# *"We aren't there yet"*

## Imagined nation in the everyday life of young Singaporeans

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**Abstract**

This thesis is about nationalism and national identification in a multicultural setting. The study examines the young Singaporeans sense of national belonging and how the Singaporean nation-state is imagined to exist. Singapore is a post-colonial multiethnic nation-state where the government has been determined to unite the heterogeneous population under one nation. The study analyses how the different strategies and discourses developed to unite the people affect the younger generation of Singaporeans sense of the nation, and what kind of discourses of Singaporeanness exist. The aim is to show how a nation can be conceptualized both in the level of a state and its people and how national ideology, often promoted by the state, is reproduced in the experiences and practices of the daily life.

The study is based on a three month ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Singapore from October to December in 2014. The study combines various qualitative research methods: go-along ethnography, participant observation, informal discussions, questionnaire, observation in events and in academic seminars and media follow-up. There were 13 informants (6 males and 7 females) between 21 and 31 years old involved in the study.

The study follows grounded theory approach. The data is thus analyzed in reference to anthropological theories of nations and nationalism and by looking at everyday nationalism. The Singaporeanness is analyzed from three perspectives:
The shared experience of growing up and living in Singapore's specific socio-political reality
The imagination of the nation as culturally coherent but at the same time essentially diverse
The global Singaporeanness as also a localized identity

The dominant discourses suggest that Singaporeans should work hard for the national unity since it is imagined to be always under threat. This creates a constant feeling of not being a plausible nation, and subsequently the inability to have a national identity. Discourses are also used to legitimate the authoritarian rule, which creates shared nationalized life experiences. Also, due to the discourse of vulnerability, the society is driven by pragmatic values and economic motives. This is reflected in people's "Singaporean behavior", which is recognized as part of common Singaporean culture. At the same time the managing of diversity and ideal national identity get different meanings in the everyday level of life. These mediated meanings eventually form the foundation of global but local Singaporeanness.

The thesis comes to the conclusion that the Singaporeanness the informants of the study express and experience differs from the ideal national identity and belonging that the government wants to promote. Young people have their own personal way to be Singaporean, which makes their sense of national belonging significant for them. However, the understandings of Singaporeanness are created and produced in the dialogue between the government's nation-building project and popular, collective understandings of Singaporeanness

Theoretically the study shows how intimate and daily life is connected to understanding of nation and national belonging. The thesis indicates that nationalism is not only a state-driven force that aims to homogenize people in the local level, but it also creates differentiated identities that get their meaning in global level and become part of people's personal daily life.

**Keywords**
nationalism, nation, Singapore, imagined community, anthropology

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**Tiivistelmä**

Tässä Pro gradu – tutkielmassa pohditaan nationalismia ja kansallista samaistumista monikulttuurisessa ympäristössä. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan nuorten singaporelaisten kansallisen kuuluvuuden tunnetta ja kuinka Singaporen kansallisvaltion olemassaolo kuvitellaan. Singapore on jälkikolonialistinen monietninen kansallisvaltio, jossa valtionjohto on määrätietoisesti pyrkinyt yhdistämään hajanaisen väestön yhdeksi kansaksi. Tutkimuksessa analysoidaan kuinka erilaiset strategiat ja diskurssit, jotka on kehitetty yhdistämää ihmisiä, vaikuttavat nuorten singaporelaisten tuntemuksiin kansakunnasta. Lisäksi pohditaan millaisia singaporelaisuuden käsityksiä on olemassa. Tavoitteena on nähdä kuinka kansakunta voidaan käsittää sekä valtion että ihmisten tasolla, ja kuinka valtion suosimaa kansallismielistä ideologiaa uusinnetaan arkipäivän kokemuksissa ja käytännöissä.

Tutkimus perustuu kolmen kuukauden kenttätyöhön, joka toteutettiin Singaporessa loka-joulukuussa 2014. Tutkimuksessa yhdistellään erilaisia laadullisen tutkimuksen menetelmiä: nk. go-along-etnografiaa, osallistuvaa havainnointia, epämuodollisia keskusteluja, kyselytutkimusta, havainnointia tapahtumissa ja akateemisissa seminaareissa sekä mediaseurantaa. Tutkimuksessa oli mukana 13 21–31-vuotiasta informanttia (6 miestä ja 7 naista).

Tutkimus seurailee grouded theory – menetelmää, ja aineistoa on analysoitu suhteessa antropologisiin teorioihin kansakunnista ja nationalismista. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan erityisesti "jokapäiväisen nationalismin" käsitettä. Analyysiluvuissa käsitellään singaporelaisuutta kolmesta näkökulmasta:

- Nuorten yhteinen kokemus Singaporen sosiopoliittisessa todellisuudessa varttumisesta ja siellä asumisesta.
- Kansakunnan kuvittelu kulttuurisesti yhtenäiseksi mutta samaan aikaan perimmiltään monimuotoiseksi.
- Globaali singaporelaisuus myös paikallistettuna identiteettinä.

Analyysissa esitetään, että vallitsevat diskurssit kehottavat singaporelaisia näkemään vaivaa kansallisen yhtenäisyyden eteen, sillä se on jatkuvasti uhattuna. Tämä tekee Singaporesta näennäisesti epäuskottavan kansakunnan ja ihmisillä ei vaikuta olevan kansallista identiteettiä. Diskursseja käytetään myös oikeuttamaan autoritääristä valtaa, mikä luo yhteisiä kansallistettuja kokemuksia. Alttius-diskurssin vuoksi yhteiskuntaa ohjaavat pragmaattiset arvot ja taloudelliset motiivit. Tämä näkyy ihmisten "singaporelaistetussa" käytöksessä, joka tunnistetaan osaksi yhteistä kansallista kulttuuria. Samalla monimuotoisuuden ohjailu ja ideaali kansallisidentiteetti saavat erilaisia merkityksiä arkielämässä. Nämä välittyneet merkitykset muodostavat lopulta globaalin ja paikallisen singaporelaisuuden perustan, jota valtionjohto ei kuitenkaan tunnusta samalla tavalla kuin nuoret singaporelaiset sen kokevat.

Tutkielman johtopäätös on, että informanttien ilmaisema ja kokema singaporelaisuus eroaa siitä, millaista kansallista identiteettiä ja kuuluvuutta valtionjohto haluaa edistää. Nuorilla on oma tapansa olla singaporelaisia, mikä tekee heidän kansallisesta kuuluvuuden tunteestaan heille merkittävää. Ymmärrys singaporelaisuudesta kuitenkin luodaan ja uusinnetaan valtionjohdon kansanluomisprojektin ja yleisen ja yhteisöllisen käsityksen välisessä vuoropuhelussa.

Teoreettisesti tutkielma esittää, kuinka jokapäiväinen elämä on yhteydessä ymmärrykseen kansallisesta identiteetistä ja kuuluvuudesta. Tutkielma osoittaa, että nationalismi ei ole vain valtion ajama voima joka pyrkii yhtenäistämään ihmisiä paikallistasolla. Sen sijaan nationalismi luo myös erilaistuneita identiteettejä, jotka saavat merkityksensä globaalilla tasolla ja tulevat osaksi ihmisten henkilökohtaista päivittäistä elämää.

**Avainsanat**
nationalismi, kansakunta, Singapore, kuviteltu yhteisö, antropologia

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# 1 Introduction

"I wait for the day when I can just say "I'm a human being.""

It was just another hot and humid night in Singapore. I was in a night bus with my Singaporean friend. We were having an intense conversation about multiculturalism, ethnic identities and nationality after a seminar where local academics had given presentations about these issues in Singapore. My friend was frustrated with the fact that in today's world we define others according to their nationality or home country. When we meet new people allegedly outside your own national category, we often ask "where are you from" to figure out which place in the world that person belongs in. We might also make presumptions of someone's nationality, or belonging, based on their physical appearance, language, accent, dressing style or religious conviction. If someone's appearance or accent does not fit to our expectations of that nationality, we ask for further explanations: "where are you *really* or *originally* from?" How can the countries we have grew up or lived in tend to define us so much? How can a country be a fundamental basis for understanding human beings?

In this thesis I explore the significance of national identification and national thinking in a multicultural setting. The study is based on an ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the city-state of Singapore in autumn 2014. I will examine the sense of national belonging in young Singaporeans and how the Singaporean nation-state is imagined to exist. I refer to the anthropological theories of nationalism and analyze how national ideology, often promoted by the state, is reproduced in daily life experiences and practices. Analytically I delve into normative, state-driven and popular national discourses. By observing the everyday practices that represent these discourses we can better understand how people experience and understand a nation.

The city-state of Singapore is an interesting place to study nationalism. Firstly, throughout the 50 years of Singapore's independent history, the government's task has been to build and uphold a nation-state that would be a place for incredibly

heterogeneous population. As an originally immigrant society, post-colonial Singapore is nowadays one of the most complex multi-ethnic nation-states in the world. Singaporeans themselves are mainly Chinese, Malay and Indian descent, but in addition to this, about 35% of the people living in the city-state are foreigners. Secondly, the island is only 714 square kilometers. The city-state is an intensive urban space where the Singaporean nation should exist.

These two factors, heterogeneity and intensity, generate an interesting setting to study nationalism, which generally refers to people's desire to form a distinct group, a nation, with each other. Do Singaporeans have this desire or feeling that there is a nation where they belong to? How has the state contributed in this? These are some of the questions I will reflect it this thesis. In the end, my aim is also to consider how and why a country can define us, and why we are not (yet) just human beings.

## 1.1 Research questions and perspective of the study

Singapore is rather interesting place to study nationalism if one considers not only it's being as multi-ethnic city-state, but also for its post-colonial nation-building process. Since becoming independent in 1965, the Singaporean government has been determined to build a nationally coherent and harmonious society. I will consider how these nation-building efforts affect the younger generation of Singaporeans sense of the nation, and what kind of discourses of Singaporeanness exist. While concentrating on the notions of *sense of national belonging* and *imagining of the nation*, my aim is to see the bigger picture of how a nation can be conceptualized both in the level of a state and its people. By analyzing the national discourses in Singapore, I will indicate how dominant ideas of a nation make it look like a "natural order" of the society, and how people in everyday presence and practices might express their own kinds of representations of those discourses.

My two research questions are: "What kind of daily experiences and ideas unite people, creating affinity and mutual feeling of being one nation?" and "How do these experiences and ideas relate to the state's efforts and discursive practices to build a nation?" I have elaborated these questions in the following chapters to focus more on the issue at hand. The key concept is *being Singaporean*, to which I will now on

refer as *Singaporeanness*. The analysis is based on my ethnographic observations on how Singaporeans act, speak and behave as part of their normal and daily life, and how Singaporeanness could be interpreted based on those observations.

My main argument is that the Singaporeanness my informants express and experience differs from the ideal national identity and belonging that their government wants to promote. Young people have their own way to be Singaporean, which makes their sense of national belonging significant for them. At the same time the official national discourses feel empty and forced. However, the understanding of Singaporeanness is created and produced in the dialogue between the government's nation-building project and popular, collective understandings of Singaporeanness.

I analyze my argument from three perspectives. First I will discuss about the authoritarian nature of Singaporean society, and how my informants connect that to the Singaporeanness. Then I will consider how Singaporeanness can be imagined as culturally coherent through stereotypical definitions. Last I consider the (multi)cultural aspects of Singaporeanness and its mediated nature. All these will be analyzed in relation to the official national discourses.

This study is purely qualitative and anthropological. Besides ethnographic methods the study follows the grounded theory approach (Bryman 2012 [2001], 387), which means that the theoretical framework emerges from my data and thus focuses on everyday nationalism and the pervasiveness of national ideology. I follow the idea of nationalism as discursive formation. Sociologist Craig Calhoun (2002, 27) defines this discursiveness as

> "…a way of talking, writing, and thinking about the basic units of culture, politics, and belonging that helps to constitute nations as real and powerful dimensions of social life".

By observing and describing how official national ideology and national discourses promoted by the state are received and accepted among people, we can try to understand the sense of a nation those people have. On the other hand, I will also interpret the national community the people themselves produce; through what

kinds of situations, experiences and realities the sense of a nation is produced, and is there consistency between the state and people's ideas of a nation?

National ideology and national discourses get different forms in different societies and countries. Anthropologist Bruce Kapferer (1989) writes how ideology is connected to ontology: we should try to understand the structure of nationalist reasoning, and how nationalist ideology works as a particular orientation to the world. Ontologically grounded ideology becomes a part of life and practices of human action. (Kapferer 1989, 202-4.) In other words, national ideology is not only something that a state is trying to promote, but a way in which people might understand and define their world, as their moral, emotional and political lives get articulated as national ideology. National thinking has a huge impact in today's world, so it is important to understand how it works in different societies. My example from Singapore is just one among others, and the same questions could be asked in different national contexts.

In wider perspective this means that nationalism is not only a state-driven force that aims to homogenize people in the local level, but it also creates differentiated identities that aquire meaning in globalized level and become part of people's personal daily life. My aim is give insights on how daily life can be connected to understandings of nationness and belonging, as I move between micro and macro level of nationalism.

I focus on the construction of a nation on a very general level. In the case of multi-ethnic Singapore, I am interested to analyze an emerging supra-ethnic nationalism and how it is connected to the official national discourses. This is why I am consciously dismissing such significant factors as ethnicity, class and gender in my analysis. It would be impossible to include these intersectional ties in a mere Master's thesis, which already aims to summarize something about such a vast topic as nationalism. If I would continue this study further in the future, I could use those factors to say something more about the issues presented here.

## 1.2 Previous studies about Singapore

Anthropological research about Singapore is almost non-existent, and mostly local sociologists have conducted ethnographic studies in Singapore. There is an abundance of research about ethnic relations and national integration in Singapore (e.g. Chua, Siddique, Ackermann, Ortmann), and especially after the 1990's, when the government started to actively promote nationalism, sparking an increase in academic studies on the topic (Ortmann 2009, 31).

Interestingly, the studies about national identity have come to almost contradictory conclusions of the nature of nationalism in Singapore. Many survey-based (and often government-financed) empirical researches show that Singaporeans have a strong sense of belonging, but other kind of studies claim the opposite (Ortmann 2009, 34). More recently, the studies of Singaporean nation have taken a transnational approach that concentrates on Singaporean emigrants and their ties to home country (see e.g. Velayutham 2007; Brenda S.A. Yeoh & Lily Kong 2003; Elaine Ho 2006).

Academic literature about Singaporean nation has often concentrated on examining the effectiveness and achievements of post-colonial nation building, and according to sociologist Selvaraj Velayutham (2007, 35-43), most studies have argued that the government has performed well in its task. Velayutham sees that one reason behind this is that the idea of nation, national identification, and nationalism has not been properly problematized in Singaporean scholarly writing. Instead, the quest for national identity and notion of nationality are normalized and accepted as natural objectives (ibid, 39). This does not mean that there would not be any critical approaches. There are several studies, which indicate the challenges and shortcomings of nation building (See e.g. Barr & Skrbis 2008; Beng-Huat Chua 1995; Cherian George 2000; Souchou Yao 2007; Chris Hudson 2013; Nasir & Turner 2014).

Extensive studies have been made about *how* the state has carried out its nation-building project, but they still do not look at the nationalist preoccupations. The emphasis is often on the problematic beginning of the state and how post-colonial Singapore has had to form the nation from scratch. This has framed the studies to

concentrate on how the construction of national identity should be understood in the Singaporean context. (Velayutham 2007, 36-37.) The socio-political construction of national identity has been commonly studied through social institutions like educational system, work place, the public housing, multiculturalism, social policies, media and national celebrations (Velayutham 2007, 39).

Thus anthropological study can shed new light on nationhood in Singapore. With the ethnographic fieldwork the study can get closer to the people's sense of the nation; instead of merely evaluating how the different initiatives and policies have contributed to developing that sense, or if the nation-building has worked or not. I will analyze the ways the nation is understood as an outcome of that nation building. As my analysis is relying rather heavily on these previous studies about Singaporean society, my aim is combine their perceptions to mine, and reflect my own ethnographic data on them.

## 1.3 Central concepts and structure of the thesis

I will use several complex terms and concepts, which could be a topic for a thesis on their own. They will be clarified on the way, but I briefly explain some of their usage here. Some concepts are explained with the help of Merriam-Webster online thesaurus and dictionary[1].

According to the classical anthropological definition, **culture** refers to the customs, habits, behavior, speech and conduct shared by a certain group or community. Culture is not static or systematic, but constantly reproduced and recreated by people and their practices. I acknowledge that there are no straightforward definitions for culture. Therefore, in this study culture is understood in its Singaporean, post-colonial context, where culture and **ethnicity** are interwoven and refer to various traditions, beliefs, religions and language used by ethnic groups. Also the words ethnicity and race are used as synonyms on a daily basis. Talk about people's ethnic origins and race is common, and should not be understood in

[1] http://www.merriam-webster.com/

negative terms. Ethnicity and race have fixed institutionalized and practical meaning in Singapore, and they are used in very concrete terms (Chua 2003, 58).

The word **nation** and its derivatives are used widely in this thesis. **Nation** is a community of **people** who are assumed to belong together based on their common **nationality**, defined territory or history. With the adjective **national,** I refer to things shared by the people of a certain nation. **Nation-states** are formed when a nation lives under a particular area and government. **Nationalism** is consciousness about the nation and its definitions, and this sense of belonging to a nation creates national identity. Nationalism turns into **national ideology**, when it is used as an (political) orientation to organize people or the state.

**National discourse** is one of the main concepts in my study. For me discourse means the formal or established way of thinking about the nation. Discourse is a widely accepted idea by a group of people, of how things are or should be, and a means of defining the reality and conveying meaning (Bryman 2012, 528-540). Within this thesis, discourse explains the strategies that are used to argue for the dominant ideas.

**The structure of the thesis is the following:**

In the next methodology chapter I describe the research methods used in this study, explaining the conditions of my ethnographic fieldwork and further argument on certain definitions and limitations of the study. In chapter three I present the overall theoretical framework of the thesis and the relevant concepts coming up in the analysis. Chapter four is an overview on Singaporean society and its history and presents the context of my analysis. Chapters five, six, and seven are the main data analysis chapters in which I use several different case studies to exemplify nationalism in Singapore. In chapter eight I make concluding remarks about the thesis and summarize the main arguments derived from my analysis. The bibliography and a list of other references are at the end of the thesis.

# 2 Methodology

Anthropological research is about describing individuals as part of a group or community, and most anthropologists conduct an ethnographic fieldwork to collect this data (Bernard 2006, 23-25). Put simply, ethnographic fieldwork could be defined as process of "joining a group, watching what goes on, making some notes, and writing it all up", as the researcher is supposed to involve extensively in the social life of the people studied (Bryman 2012, 431). Specific research methods anthropologists are using during an ethnographic fieldwork include participant observation, interviews and questionnaires, and collecting stories and narratives from specific informants. Depending on the data, there are various ways to process it: text and narrative analysis, discourse analysis or coding the field notes and transcribed interviews. Nowadays these traditional methods are also applied for example to the online world.

Anthropological qualitative studies are empirical and when analyzing the data, most researchers follow interpretivist tradition and phenomenological approach (Bernard 2006, 24). An ethnographic study is not meant to produce generalized information about an issue, but rather a glance into a specific case or phenomenon. Anthropologists are not giving answers about what people think or why they do something. Instead they suggest how people's thoughts, feelings and behavior can be interpreted and what this might tell about the phenomenon or issue at hand.

Anthropologists have to balance between objectivity and subjectivity, and a part of the research is to reflect your own position on the field. The observations on the field and the interpretation of the data are researcher's subjective perspectives, even though scientific study should be objective. There are also some ethical challenges especially what come to the informants. Anthropologist may become friends with their informants, and at the same time is treating them as research subjects. Sometimes dealing with sensitive issues may even put the informants in danger. In this study I follow the code of ethics by American Anthropological Association.

## 2.1 Field and informants

I conducted my three month fieldwork, or better to say micro-ethnography, in Singapore from October to December in 2014. I chose Singapore because I had familiarized myself with the area and its history while writing my Bachelor's thesis about ethnic issues in Malaysia. I have also spent two months in Singapore's neighboring city, Johor Bahru in Malaysia in 2012, and had visited Singapore couple of times then.

The history of modern Singapore started in 1819 when a British statesman Thomas Stamford Raffles set foot and founded Singapore to be a trading settlement for British East Asian Company. During the colonial times the administrative foundations were put up and rapid development of Singapore started. The city was made to be a thriving trading port in Southeast Asia. Immigrants mainly from China, India and surrounding Malay areas came in search for economic opportunities and settled on the island. Singapore became independent in 1965 and is now an urban city-state in Malay Peninsula. In past 50 years Singapore has gone from two to almost six million inhabitants, and GDP per capita grew from $2500 in 1960's to almost $37,000 per person in 2013 (Trading Economics 2015).

Singapore is indisputably an economic success story and one of the most modernized societies in Asia. It is a financial capital of Asia with an authoritarian regime and so-called one-party democracy. People's Action Party (PAP) has been in charge for all of Singapore's 50-year history, and the opposition has had very little leverage in the parliament. The PAP has been the ruling party in Singapore since 1959. Singapore has parliamentary democracy, and PAP has always won most of the seats in the parliament[2]. The first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew led PAP and the country dictatorially until 1990, and the current Prime Minister is his son Lee Hsien Long.

Cherian George (2000) has described Singapore aptly as an air-conditioned nation, which provides comfortable and convenient life in the tropics as a reward for

[2] In the latest General Elections in 2015 PAP won 83 out of 89 seats. The worst result PAP had in the previous elections in 2011 when it won 81 out of 87 seats. (www.eld.gov.sg)

subjecting oneself to centralized control. The authoritarian nature of the regime stretches to people's intimate lives as will be described later. For tourists the city-state is famous for its strict laws and penalties: chewing gum is banned, jaywalking prohibited, and one can be fined for littering and for not flushing the toilet. Besides the restricted and conservative political atmosphere, Singapore is also well known for the iconic skyline of Marina Bay area, which symbolizes the prosperity, modernity, and global progress the city-state wants to represent.

Singapore works as a laboratory example for studying nationalism. The island is only 50km from east to west, and 26km from north to south. People are squeezed into the island making the population density one of the highest in the world, 7,600 people per sq.km. Out of the island's 5.46 million inhabitants only 3.43 million are Singaporean citizens. When excluding permanent residents and naturalized citizens, only half of the population are real born and bred Singaporeans in daily understanding. The remaining 2 million people are mainly immigrants working in manufacturing, construction and domestic services (foreign workers) and in professional duties (foreign talents), or expatriates. Singapore has an ethnic Chinese majority (75%) despite being surrounded by dominantly Malay-Muslim countries. Other significant ethnic groups are Malays (13%) and Indians (9%). Singapore is a throughout immigrant society, as even the Malays, recognized as the indigenous people, are mainly from Malaysia and Indonesia. (Singapore Department of Statistics 2015.)

Before the fieldwork, I did an extensive background reading about Singapore and followed actively the news and social media around the topic. I also found two Singaporean contacts based in Finland and UK. I discussed with them about my topic to get some comments and help from them. This guided me to get a more accurate idea of where I am going and what to expect. They both also linked me up with their friends in Singapore, so that once I arrived I had already some people to meet and discuss with.

Before moving to Singapore I also contacted the Asia Research Institute (ARI) in the National University of Singapore (NUS) to ask if they could aid me to get an access

to the NUS library and its resources. I ended up being attached to the ARI as a voluntary intern and was able to use their facilities during my stay. I also had a supervisor for my study, Dr. Tabea Bork-Hüffer, who gave me advice, contacts and comments to proceed with my fieldwork.

Despite my efforts to find an accommodation from an average Singaporean public housing neighborhood, I ended up staying in a condominium in an upmarket area known for its expat communities. This was a pity in a sense that 80% of Singaporeans live in public housing estates, and condominiums are often filled up with expats and affluent Singaporeans. However, I was lucky that my landlords, a Singaporean woman and her American companion, kindly took me as part of their daily life from weekly grocery shopping to countless dinner parties with their friends and family. I met lots of Singapore-based people from various backgrounds, and got some valuable insights into my topic and life in Singapore in general.

I quickly noticed that younger and older generation of Singaporeans have very different, if not controversial perspectives on my topic. I decided to concentrate on the younger generation for mainly practical reasons. I felt that it would be more natural for me to do the study among people around my age, and it was easier to get into contact with them, getting their trust and speaking to them than what would have been with the older people.

I found most of my informants through the first two Singaporean contacts I had in Europe, and later through website Couchsurfing.com. Couchsurfing is an international online platform for hospitality exchange, where locals can offer to host travelers or organize events in their hometowns. I often attended weekly meetings of local couchsurfer's community to get into contact with Singaporeans. I also posted a message on the Singapore discussion forum asking if there were any locals willing to help me with my study, or otherwise just meet me and show me around in Singapore.

I got loads of replies and tried to meet all the people individually at least once, and a few of them couple of times. I asked them to show me around the places of their

choice, preferably in their own neighborhood. I emphasized that I want to get an insight into local way of life. This gave me already an idea about the places that these Singaporeans found important for them, or what they thought was relevant for me to see in the context of my study, Singaporeans sense of national belonging. Usually we had lunch or dinner together, after that we would tour the neighborhoods and discuss about the life in Singapore. Sometimes, I met them in groups of two or three usually in a café, bar or restaurant.

This way of meeting people led to the fact that I did not do any recorded or structured interviews. Instead, I had free-flowing discussions where I most often posed similar questions to everyone, and observed to what direction the conversation went. After these meetings I tried to write down my observations and important parts of the discussion. When I asked my main informants if they agreed to be interviewed after the initial meetings, but they did not want to. As will be explained later, I was studying rather sensitive issue in Singapore. I will use pseudonyms of my informants and avoid sharing any specific information about their personal backgrounds.

A couple of these informants turned out to be almost like my research assistants accompanying me on various events and suggesting things to read and see. They worked also as cultural interpreters when there was something happening that I could not understand as an outsider. After the fieldwork one of them continued to help me by sharing some information and material from events held after my stay.

To finish off my fieldwork, I made a short questionnaire for my informants as an experiment of what kind of data I would get with different kind of method, and if there would be some new perspectives emerging. As I had already discussed with them about the questions, I somewhat knew the replies I would get, and I was able to analyze them better. However, because of the highly un-professional nature of the questionnaire I have not included it as a formal source of data to this thesis. I have used the responds to support the conversations I already had had with these informants.

Altogether, in this study I have 13 informants (6 males and 7 females) who are between 21 and 31 years old. They all are at least second-generation Singaporeans. A couple of them were students in a university or polytechnic, but most had already graduated and working full-time. They represent all the official ethnic groups of Singapore, following roughly the percentage of each ethnic group in the population. Most of my informants had traveled or stayed abroad for longer times. Especially those who contacted me through Couchsurfing; they were interested in traveling, sharing their culture and learning from mine. This fact might increase a bit of bias towards my study, as my informants might be more open and tolerant compared to more patriotic Singaporeans, who would have stronger nationalist views. On the other hand, it is also an asset that my informants have experiences abroad, as it might give them wider insight into Singaporeanness.

## 2.2 Collecting data

Instead of doing in-depth interviews, which would only give me someone's personal opinions on my questions, I focused on so-called "go-along ethnography" by just spending time with the informants in places where they liked to spend time in (Kusenbach 2003). Obviously many of the meetings were planned for me to see or experience something new in Singapore. I mainly trusted in naturally occurring discourse what comes to the things Singaporeans were telling to me or talking about. Following the idea of sociologists Fox & Miller-Idriss (2008, 540; 560), I wanted to listen the "talk about the nation", which would reveal how my informants "give discursive shape and content to their otherwise taken-for-granted understanding of the nation".

As vague as it might sound, the daily life in Singapore was the main participant observation I did. Every day I noticed or overheard something that I felt was relevant for my topic, and in very random and surprising situations I got new ideas for analysis. Being Singaporean is negotiated in very basic daily situations and encounters. These negotiations happen in the metro, at the queue of a coffee shop or during a meal with friends.

I collected data in several ways: with participant observation, informal discussions, and questionnaire, analyzed nationalist campaigns, observed in events and in academic seminars, and generally paid attention on things and happenings around me. I also actively followed up alternative news sites, social media and discussion online since early 2014 until summer 2015. Because of the extensive press censorship in Singapore, the internet is an important platform for expressing opinions and commenting political issues anonymously. Also Facebook turned out to be a resourceful platform to follow debates when people commented on posts shared by news websites.

As part of my fieldwork I familiarized myself with the local academic discussion about nation building in Singapore by spending half of the weeks in the library of the NUS. One local researcher told me about a seminar series called *Living with Myths*, which turned out to be crucial for structuring my whole thesis. These seminars also gave me an interesting perspective on the way my topic was discussed among academia, and I made some very valuable observations about the dominant discourses about Singaporeanness.

Living with Myths is a "project on exploring Singapore's pasts and futures" started by three local historians. The aim of the project is to unpack the myths of Singapore's history. The project started in July 2014 with monthly seminars, where researchers give presentations around various themes in the context of Singaporean historical myths. During the fieldwork I attend three seminars, but as the events are video recorded, I have had an access to all of them online. The project is not connected to universities, research institutes or any other official institutions, and the events were held in the premises of a theatre company. There was a pre-registration, as the events were quite popular. There was roughly 50-100 people attending, depending on the date and theme of the seminar. Most of the participants were probably local students and researchers, or otherwise academically aware people.

Attending these seminars made me realize how the government's nation-building efforts are really an important issue in Singapore. The amount of attention and interest these issues get among the local academia indicates that it is significant to

understand the discourses of Singaporeanness created with these myths. The speakers of the seminars were giving presentations about historical events and realities, which are usually dismissed in official historical narrative. They were thus suggesting that there are some alternative narratives and ways to understand Singapore, which should be discussed about more. In chapter four I will explore these discourses more while they also function as a framework for the analysis.

## 2.3 Self-reflection and limitations of the study

Ethnographic fieldwork is always full of surprises, and unexpected when on the field. My topic changed and specified on the way as I learned more about Singaporean way of life. My initial research plan focused on memories and nostalgia as I wanted to use a certain online project as my case study. Unfortunately, once I was on the field this plan did not work out, and I had to come up with a new one. I ended up discussing with my informants about their experiences of growing up and living in Singapore, and what kind of meaning Singaporeanness has for them. This data shaped the framework of my thesis and led me to write about nationalism. However, the rapid changes in the relatively short period of time does mean that the data I have obtained is not as thick and rich as I hoped. I felt that it is better to try to grasp as much data and meet as many Singaporeans I could rather than use the scarce time to come up with a more specific focus.

What comes to the ethnography and participant observation as a method, I had moments when I doubted my research ethics even though I do my best to follow the code of ethics by American Anthropological Association. Even though I tried to be clear about my study, I felt that some of the people I met did not really realize that I might use their sayings in my thesis, and that I was constantly observing their behavior and speech. For example, one informant kept joking how I am observing the people on the street, although I was mainly listening and observing him.

Sometimes I felt uncomfortable with my Singaporean friends, when they talked about something I found very interesting, but did not dare to start taking notes. Once this happened in a bar at 1am: “Can I quote that in my thesis?” I asked and got a laugh and “Sure!” as a response. Can I then really use it? One of my best friends was

surprised when I said I would quote him in my thesis even though he had been consciously helping me for three months to do the study. I was all the time balancing between being an anthropologist and a friend.

I often got some interesting first reactions and comments about my topic from random people I met. I wrote those things down since I considered it as valuable data. I did not meet these people ever again, and I know nothing about them like name, age, occupation or family background. Nevertheless, those comments revealed the impression people had about the sense of belonging in Singapore.

I also had to consider my status as a European student in Singapore. As around 35% of inhabitants are foreigners, and the Caucasian expat communities are part of the society, my physical presence in Singapore as such was nothing unusual. "Are you here for business?" was a common question. Most people assumed me to be an exchange student or an expat. When I told my real purpose of staying in Singapore, most people were positively surprised that I had such a genuine interest for their country and the people. After chatting for a while they noticed that I knew lots about Singapore, as some said "more than Singaporeans themselves".

As a disclaimer, my informants or the data I gathered is by no means representative of the whole Singaporean society. The purpose of qualitative study is not to generalize, give answers or measure anything (Bryman 2012, 380.) As my data is very limited, the purpose of the study is to give an example how these selected Singaporeans reflect nationalism, and what kind of analysis and conclusion can be drawn from that. Qualitative study is about "seeing through the eyes of the research participants" (Bryman 2012, 412), so this study is not eligible to generalize Singaporeans perceptions about the nation. That said, I suggest my study gives an alternative insight into understanding of Singaporeanness from the perspective of young Singaporean adults.

# 3 Theory: Anthropology of nations

Theoretical framework of this study follows the grounded theory approach, where the theory emerges from the collection and analysis of the data (Bryman 2014, 387). As I was going through my field notes, I realized that the connecting factor for the various conversations about life in multicultural Singapore was not the ethnic identities or cultural differences between Singaporeans, but instead something else that was binding them together as a *nation*. I thus decided to concentrate on theories of nationalism, which could explain how Singaporeans are bounded together. I am focusing on the notions of common culture, intimacy and negotiations in nationalism, themes appeared strongly in my data.

The study of nationalism and modern nation-states was for many years in the hands of political scientists, sociologists, and historians before anthropologists took a bigger role in the discussion during 1980's (Eriksen (2010 [1994], 118-9). Nations were often thought to be rather Western and large-scale phenomena for anthropologists to study, and it seemed inconvenient to carry out a classic fieldwork among a nation. In his influential book *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) political scientist Benedict Anderson started using anthropological language to define nationalism as he wrote about imagination, narratives and communities, and saw nationalism as a cultural artefact similar to kinship and religion (Anderson 1983, 13-15). This caused the study of nations to expand to the new directions in different disciplines, and affected also too the anthropological research of nationalism, both as source of inspiration and criticism.

The general focus on Euro-American national histories has created a bias in theory and research on nationalism. However, there are insightful anthropological studies, which shed light on alternative and contemporary approaches on nationalism. E.g. Bruce Kapferer (1988) has studied the similarities of nationalism in Sri Lanka and Australia, Danilyn Rutherford (2003) the national belonging in Indonesian West Papua, and John Kelly & Martha Kaplan (2001) criticize Anderson in their co-authored book about origins of nation-state in multi-ethnic Fiji.

The overall academic discussion about nationalism is vast. In this chapter I discuss only those anthropological theories of nationalism that are relevant for my topic. Later in my analysis chapters I will bring up some specific theoretical insight applicable in the issue in hand. I consciously ignore some major theories and trends because of the limited scope of the thesis. I will start with classic theories on nationalism and move on to the critique and new insights brought by post-colonial studies. I also look briefly at theories of cosmopolitanism and their connection to the notion of nation in Singapore. Last I focus on more recent approach called everyday nationalism, which is central for my analysis.

## 3.1 Classic ideas on nationalism

The modernist writers understand nationalism as largely Western and European ideology (Gellner 1983; Henley 1995, 294). In industrializing Europe there was a need to create loyalty and cohesion, as people were not organized by their kins or villages anymore. People's attachment was directed to the state instead. For this nationalist ideology to work the state had to be politically effective and the people, i.e. nation, should be the embodiment of that effective state. Anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2010, 126) argues that nationalist ideology aims to "re-create sentiment of wholeness and continuity" so that the modern rupture between individual and society can be transcended. However, for nationhood to emerge there has to be nationalist people who believe and imagine it possible. Nationhood has to appeal to wider masses for it to be an effective political tool. (Ibid)

The most influential writings of nationalism came from Ernest Gellner, Anthony Smith and Benedict Anderson (Sabra 2007). Ernest Gellner was a social anthropologist and a well-known scholar of nationalism. For him nationalism is primarily a political concept, and national unit should be consistent with it. Gellner (1983) saw that there is a link between ethnicity and state, and that nationalism is foremost an ethnic ideology. In the core of a nation-state there should be a dominant ethnic group, whose identity markers are used as official national symbols. The members of the nation should recognize mutual rights and duties to each other. (Gellner 1983.) In other words, there is a strong normative idea that nation should be ethnically consistent.

Another scholar of nationalism, sociologist Anthony Smith, also sees nationalism and ethnicity interwoven, but so that nations might have existed before nationalist ideology took root. Ethnic communities were so-called pre-nations. For Smith a nation-state is a powerful and ubiquitous reality that defines our cultural outlook and political endeavors. It is also a source of international legitimacy. (Smith 1995.)

Political scientist Benedict Anderson (1983) emphasizes the individuals' need to identify themselves as part of collective. Anderson sees nations as imagined political and sovereign communities where people have a sense of belonging without really knowing each other. Each nation is imagined as unique in space and time, and thus nations should be distinguished by the style they imagine themselves (Anderson 1983, 15). Anderson is also interested in the force and persistence of a nation, and asks why people are prepared to die for such an abstract community as a nation.

Classic modernist theories often essentialize nations. They are seen as natural development of the world even though being constructions of the modern era (see e.g. Gellner 1983). These accounts fall short when we look at plural and post-colonial origins of societies, or more recently, the effects of globalization. Even though the classic writers agree that nationalism is not natural per se, there is still a presumed connection between a nation, a state and territory. This idea has been criticized by post-colonial writers, as it is a rather Eurocentric perspective. (Sabra 2007, 78.)

## 3.2 Post-colonial critique on nationalism

After decolonization there were plenty of new states coming up around the world, Singapore being one of them. Following the globally dominant nationalist ideology, the task for new states was to create a homogenous and politically effective nation-state. Anderson sees that the emergence of nationalism is in fact linked to the decolonization processes rather than only to European state formation. However, for Anderson (2001) nationalism works in the same way everywhere, regardless of the differences in societies: the European nationalism would be adopted as creole way.

This idea has been widely contested by post-colonial critiques. Kelly & Kaplan (2001) highlight especially that *nation*-states are a de-colonial construction that gained ground only after Second World War and founding of the United Nations, and that the history of nationalism should be understood in dialogical rather than in dialectic sense (Kelly & Kaplan 2001, 420).

The classic theorists see nations as political and cultural units of people who share commonalities, such as language, ethnicity, history, territory, and religion. Together these commonalities are understood as **a** culture that unifies people as a nation. The states emphasize these aspects to maintain nationalist ideology (Eriksen 1994, 549.) However, the post-colonial states, such as Singapore, are very often poly-ethnic, and even though there would be a dominant ethnic group, shared ethnic identity is usually not enough to build nationhood. Many regions e.g. in Africa had two or more ethno-nationalist movements, whose fight over dominance is going on even today. Overall, the problem for these poly-ethnic states is to create a nation out of very heterogeneous population, but at the same time follow the logic of nationalist ideology in their state formation.

Decolonized nation-states were mainly institutional and ideological formations (Gupta 2001). Their first task was to write the history of the nation, which would legitimate its existence in the world order of nation-states. In face of multi-ethnicity, the equality of the citizens had to be enshrined constitutionally, and the meaning of the new state's sovereignty had to be considered. This led often to aggressive development of national discourses and practices within the country. The protection of spatial borders and economic independence was important, since the states wanted and needed to survive on their own now. (Ibid, 189-191.) There also had to be compromise between different ethnic groups and supra-ethnic symbolisms for everybody to feel being part of the new nation (Eriksen 2010, 141). In Singapore the separation from Malaysia in 1965 created this critical need to survive on their own as economically independent and ethnically harmonious city-state. In chapter four I will demonstrate how this process went in Singapore.

These post-colonial nation-building processes have contested the classic ideas of nationalism, as the understanding of a nation has expanded. They show that national identification can be based on shared historical and territorial experiences instead of common ethnic or cultural background. In multi-ethnic states, nationalism has to be future-orientated instead of relying on colonial history. (Eriksen 2010, 142.) However, nation building in multi-ethnic states is often seen as problematic, failed or superficial project, as the ideal model of nation-state is still thought to be the classic European pure nation-state, which fulfils the criteria of different commonalities.

Nowadays nationalism should be understood in the context of cultural systems out of which it came into being (Billig 1995, 23). In post-colonial states like Singapore, the nation-state model was brought by colonial imperialism. In principle, the Singaporean government has to fight against Western forms and structures, but at the same time adopt those to be a plausible nation-state (Ong 2005, 17). In this thesis I will present this cultural and socio-political context and conditions in which the nationalism may or may not flourish in Singapore. Singapore is a good example of a place where the national ideology promoted by the state does not makes sense to the people, as I will show in my analysis.

## 3.3 National culture, identity, and discursive practices

Thomas Hylland Eriksen has studied nationalism in Trinidad and Mauritius and concludes that the previously dominant idea of ethnic nationalism being more natural can be radically challenged. When the nation-states face the "problem" of multi-ethnicity, new kind of national cultures may emerge in diverse settings, and nationalism can create new supra-ethnic national cultures. (Eriksen 1994, 550.) Immigrant societies like Singapore is an example how the politically created concept of *civic* nationalism (instead of the ethnic one) is needed in order to maintain the predominant construction of a nation-state, and to control the diverse population. The point is that anybody born in a country can adopt the national identity, since it is not linked with the people themselves, but with the physical territory, history and lifestyle shared by those people.

Nevertheless, despite being a beautiful idea, even civic nationalism can have underlying commitments to certain cultural or racial definitions of who is a proper citizen (Calhoun 2007, 42). According to sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall (2002, 28) civic nationalism does not serve its purpose, because people's identification cannot be constructed in relation to a political system alone. It has to be based on cultural meanings and embedded in imagined community, which has certain cultural particularities. In my analysis I will suggest that in Singapore the intended civic nationalism has turned out to be more culturally particular than it politically should be, creating new kind of popular understanding of Singaporeanness.

Anthropologist Aihwa Ong (2005) emphasizes that in Asian societies, like Singapore, the state and nation should be seen as two different, yet conjoined categories. There is a constant need to defend the local and national Asian culture against the Western state form due to the colonial history and adopting of Western modernity. The modernization and development has to be justified and connected to the Asian nation, so national culture becomes an important strategy of the state control over its people. Culture is emphasized as a framework for everything and works as an argument in political discourse. (Ong 2005, 17-19.) This idea is very present also in Singapore, and will be highlighted in later chapters.

Besides politically defined national culture peculiar in many Asian countries, the experience of common and shared culture is also relevant for the people's national identity. Nationalism has constituted an ideology about primary identities, where national identity is above other means of identification, and a new way for a state to claim political legitimacy (Calhoun 2007, 48). Stuart Hall (1992) claims that national cultures are one of the main sources of identity in the modern world, as we tend to see national identity as essential part of our nature. National culture is collectively represented in national identity, and people participate in constructing the nation when the national culture produces identifiable meanings about that nation. (Hall 1992, 291-3.) National identity and culture thus appear as self-reflections of the imagined national collective. They are interconnected as nation is imagined to be a culturally coherent community, and at the same time people are reflecting

themselves on that imagination, whether they are responding to that image or not. (Velayutham 2007, 42.)

Anthropologists Gupta & Ferguson (2001, 39) note that ideas of culturally distinct places reflect the fact how imagined communities are attached to equally imagined national spaces. The meaning of a nation is created and contained in national narrative, which is based on imagined common origins, traditions and heritage of the nation and its people. The national narrative produces discursive practices that contribute in constructing the unifying national identities. This involves a power play of who has the right for this discursive definition and narrating of nation. (Hall 1992, 292-5.) Nationalism as imagining and narrating culturally coherent nations is based on seeing certain national practices as the essence of the people (Hudson 2013, 6; Ong 2005, 19).

Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1990) sees that the so-called counter-narratives of the nation may challenge this essentialising and change the totalizing discourse. Nation is a modern, diverse space where there is a constant anxiety over differences. Representations of national unity try to overcome the uncontrollable diversity. For Bhabha national unity is thus inherently impossible and nation is ideologically ambivalent structure for understanding the cultural representations. Narrative authority and power regime is always disrupted and nation's discursive formation is fragile. (Bhabha 1990.) This means that there is a tension between the national discourses, and what people actually do in their daily lives. By founding out this tension we can understand the nation better, and in the case of Singapore this ambivalence of nation is especially clear (Hudson 2013, 11.), as I will state later.

Anthropologist Ana Maria Alonso (1994) has stressed the mutually reinforcing dynamic between state formation and ethnogenesis. In her argument, homogenizing state formation produces an imagined sense of community that creates a misplaced concreteness of the state and nation. It would be important to identify "the strategies through which the imagined becomes a structure of feeling embodied in material practices and lived experience" (Alonso 1994, 382).

My aim is to demonstrate the connection between the Singaporean state formation and the understanding of Singaporean nation, and how the dominant discourses and people's everyday experiences resonate with each other. The imagined national communities are made real to the people in different discourses that produce and transmit nationalist ideology. My analysis will focus on how Singaporean nation and national culture are understood, and how the government disciplines this national imagination through specific discursive practices in order to uphold the official national ideology (see also Hudson 2013, 5).

## 3.4 Thinking beyond the nation

For past two decades the theories of nationalism have been contested by studies of globalization and cosmopolitanism. Sociologist Michael Skey (2013) sees a paradox in these contemporary studies of nationalism. On the one hand, many researchers are eager to indicate the end of nation-states and highlight globalizing economic systems, transnational and cosmopolitan solidarities, and multi-ethnic societies. On the other hand, there are political-minded debates about multiculturalism and immigration which point to the increasing relevance of nationality e.g. in the USA, Western Europe, and Australia (Skey 2013, 94; Brown 1998, 35).

Unarguably nation-states have not yet vanished, and they still form the political and economic order of the world, and our nationality defines us even though maybe in more complex ways than before. National ideology has remained hegemonic despite the fact that people have simultaneous loyalties and identities, which do not follow national lines at all (Eriksen 2010, 210). Studies about transnationalism[3] have shown how people are still sticking with their national identification, and globalization has not made everybody "the same" as was supposed. So it is relevant to ask why nation-states and national identities are still so pervasive mode of identification in the modern world.

Globalization, understood as a free movement of capital, and global spread of ideas and practices, has been shaking the ideological constructions of nation-states.

[3] Transnationalism refers to the interconnectivity of people across the boundaries of nation-states (see e.g. Steven Vertovec).

However, instead of just threatening and weakening the nation, the effects have been far more complex, especially when it comes to the cultural aspects of nationalism. While certain concepts and structures spread globally, cultural peculiarities evolve as they get compared to each other. In this process identity politics has gained in importance as has happened in Singapore.

According to Gupta & Ferguson (2001), especially in post-colonial context nationalism and national identity should be understood in the context of globalization and global capitalism, which both produce and problematize the nation at the same time. As mentioned before, many Asian nation-states are balancing between Western influences and Asian traditions and values what comes to the nation building (Ong 2005). In my analysis I will show how Singapore is facing a situation where it has to be both global and modern, and traditional and locally Asian.

In our globalizing world, the concept of cosmopolitan has been used to indicate the tolerance and respect for other cultures, and the ability to live together with differences (Werbner 2008). Cosmopolitanism is often seen as an alternative for nationalism, a nationally rootless being in the world, and as thinking "beyond the nation". More recently, the theories have concentrated on cosmopolitan loyalties and localities instead of lack of belonging (Werbner 2008, 2).

Sociologist Craig Calhoun (2008) has criticized how people proclaiming to be cosmopolitans do not recognize the social conditions of their own discourse, as they see themselves being free from social belonging. Calhoun claims that cosmopolitanism is often presented as enemy of national solidarity, even though it could be seen just as special sort of belonging and complementing national solidarity (Calhoun 2008, 441-2).

Following Calhoun, I will argue that in Singapore cosmopolitanism is in fact strongly linked to nationalism. Both Singapore as a state and Singaporeans themselves can be seen as inherently cosmopolitan. Multi-ethnic nation can work as a space of myriad cosmopolitan encounters and experiences, where even patriotism is in fact

by definition cosmopolitan (Werbner 2008, 13). In multi-ethnic nation-states there, has to be a certain cosmopolitan aspirations for people to have a sense of national belonging, and for the nationalist ideology to be effective (ibid, 238). Ambiguous concept of *vernacular cosmopolitanism* that combines the notion on local and global is probably the best term to describe the Singaporean understanding of nationalism in this sense. Further presentation and analysis of cosmopolitanism in Singapore will be presented in chapters 4.3 and 6.4.

## 3.5 Everyday nationalism

Compared to modernist ideas of nationalism, post-colonial studies and more recent studies about globalization and cosmopolitanism have suggested new insights into understanding of nations, national identities and nationalism in today's world. In this thesis Singapore works as a case study for these new insights. However, to study Singaporean nationalism in more detail, I approach it from the perspective of *everyday nationalism* that elaborates the criticism of the essentialist idea of national identity as something natural based on political principles of nationalism.

Modern nationalist ideology is aimed to serve bureaucratic state and social organization, but the nations, as communities of people, have emotional and even religious-like meanings (Eriksen 1993, 2). Imagining the nation is a conscious practice that makes the nation exist in peoples' minds and lives. New scholars of nationalism suggest that we should examine the presence of a nation in everyday life and how nationalism is *used* in contemporary nationalist settings (Calhoun 2008, 28-9). Also, in order to analyze the cultural battles over national identity and to understand nationalism, we have to understand *how* people inhabit those identities and how it shapes their life (Reicher & Hopkins 2001, 3).

Nations, nationalism and national identification are relevant area of study for anthropologists, when nation can be seen as a form of life (Sabra 2007; Billig 1995) Rather than understanding the nation as an actual bounded entity, with a homogeneous character, most anthropologists now concentrate on the idea of "national character" and the emphasis is often placed on core national values as discursive constructions, which have emerged in battles over the right to define national identity (Hall 1992; Sabra 2007, 95).

Cultural theorist Greg Noble though has criticized the focus of research being too much on the role of narrative and discursive construction of national identities, as it does not explain how nation is present in our everyday lives (Noble 2002, 53). Nationalism is not only an ideology promoted by the nation-states. It can be a particular orientation to the world and a deep part of human actions and practices (Kapferer 1989, 202-3). Thus my aim is to first look at the official discursive construction of nationalism, and then how it is linked to the presence of nation in everyday life, and what kind of nationalism Singaporeans themselves might promote.

Social psychologist Michael Billig was interested in relationship between ideologies and common sense and is well-known for his usage of everyday nationalism -approach. In his book *Banal Nationalism* (1995) Billig argues that the nation is indicated in the daily lives, and nationalism is in fact the endemic condition, a form of life. National identity means the possessing of ways of talking about nationhood, and it is embodied in the banal habits of social life, such as using the national language. (Billig 1995, 8.) So for Billig, nationalism is something normal and even normative.

Sociologist Michael Skey has studied everyday nationalism among the white British majority in UK and criticizes Billig for the lack of complexity and dynamism in his study. Instead of just examining the banal ways to belong to the nation, Skey (2013) asks why belonging to a nation might matter and to whom, and when a national framework is used to make sense of a particular issue (Skey 2013, 82; see also Calhoun 2007). In his study Skey is theorizing the micro-social dimension of everyday belonging and the practical and psychological benefits of having a settled sense of identity, place and community. National forms of life also underpin our sense of ordered reality (Skey 2013, 94). Unlike Billig, Skey sees that nationalism is a concept, which organizes life, instead of being a norm itself.

A social anthropologist Bruce Kapferer (1989) sees nationalism as ontology, as it instils emotions and uses symbols, which are significant for people and represent the nation-state. In other words, nationalism draws on meanings and symbols,

which are important in people's everyday life in their cultural context. Nationalism organizes the normal daily life to be a conscious experience and gives meaning to it, but is thus not same thing as the course of everyday life. (Kapferer 1989)

Sociologists Jon Fox & Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008) see that nation is constructed in the practices where people discursively construct the nation by talking. The nationhood also frames the choices people make and the opportunities they have in their daily life. Similar to Kapferer, they see that nation is performed by meanings embedded in national symbols and consumed when national differences are expressed through consumption habits (ibid, 537-8).

Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld (2005) has also criticized the theories on imagined national communities for not being grounded in the details of everyday life, which makes it look like ordinary people would not have an impact on the form of their local nationalism. Official nationalist ideologies are often taken as accurate accounts of what the nation-states are actually about. Thus anthropology has a lot to give for the study of nationalism, as it looks at the significance of particular: how living social actors understand nationalism and how it emerges in intimate social spaces, which ethnographers explore. Herzfeld emphasizes the localized specifies that give nationalism distinctive meaning in an enormous range of social and cultural settings. (Ibid, 6-11.) The nation-state and its essentializing functions should not be treated as "enemies of everyday experience", but they have to be understood as part of the social life. (Herzfeld 2005.)

In this chapter I have discussed how the theories of nations has developed, and presented the relevant debates in the context of Singapore. The interest lies mainly in two issues: the ways that the state's strategic nation building resonates in people's daily experiences of the nation, and nationalism's homogenizing force in a culturally diverse setting. Following Bryman (2012, 536), I ask how social reality of a nation is produced and made real through national discourses and how the relationship between nationalist discourses and reality is manifested.

# 4 Formation of national discourses in Singapore

As I mentioned earlier, the Living with Myths – project and seminars directed me to assemble the thesis around different national discourses, which are part of the formation and understanding of Singaporeanness. This project looks at five different myths about Singapore and Singaporeans[4]:

> **The Singapore Story**: The myth that all Singaporeans have a shared history
> **Vulnerability**: The myth that Singapore is vulnerable, and young Singaporeans must not take our security for granted
> **Pioneers**: The myth that people's life experiences mirrored the nation's progress from Third to First World
> **Apathy**: The myth that Singaporeans are inert and require constant intervention from the government
> **Faultlines**: Myths of race, religion and culture, both in framing dangerous faultiness and an encompassing multiculturalism

In this chapter I present four different national discourses I have derived from these myths and from academic studies about nation building in Singapore. The chapter functions also as an overview to Singaporean society and its history.

I will demonstrate how the dominant discourses are connected to the nation building and construction of national identity. In the chapters entailing my analysis I will show how they contribute to the idea of Singaporeanness. When considering about the discourses, it is relevant to keep in mind both national ideology and idealistic definitions of a nation-state. The nation-formation in Singapore reflects the Eurocentric ideas of nations and ideals of Asian society. The national imagination of Singaporeanness is disciplined strongly with these discourses (Hudson 2013).

## 4.1 Discourse of vulnerability – Nation under a threat

The historical narrative of Singapore is commonly known as "The Singapore Story"[5], which describes the island's development from a small fishing village to a modern, prosperous city-state and financial hub in Asia in mere 50 years. In 1959 the British granted self-governance for Singapore after 140 years of colonial rule. People's

[4] http://livingwithmyths.wix.com/livingwithmyths#!about/c1enr
[5] Interestingly, it is also the title of former, rather dictatorial, PM Lee Kuan Yew's memoirs.

Action Party (PAP), led by Lee Kuan Yew, won the first elections and took charge of the new country. Neighboring Malaysia was formed in 1963 and the point was that Singapore would merge with Malaysia. However, this plan did not work out and Singapore was "kicked out from Malaysia", as the popular phrase goes, and Singapore became an independent state in August 1965. This chain of events is said to be a traumatic beginning for Singaporean state, since even the new state leaders from PAP did not believe that the tiny city-state would ever survive on its own. (Hudson 2013, 36-7.)

The beginning of the Singaporean *nation* is another story. Theoretically, Singapore started as a state without a nation: there was no peoplehood upon which to build the state, and people did not necessarily have an interest to form a nation. Thus the new government took an active role in building the nation from above in order for Singapore to become a plausible state in the world. (Kwok & Ali 1998, 113.) The point was to unify the diverse immigrant population under one nation so that people would identify themselves collectively as Singaporeans. The construction national identity was purely a state-driven project. (Velayutham 2007, 10-1.) The strong transnational ties people had with their former home countries were oversimplified or totally dismissed in history writing to enable the creation of new, pure national and historical narrative of Singapore (ibid, 25).

The national narrative thus emerged from the circumstances of becoming an independent city-state unwillingly, coupled with having an ethnically diverse population on a small island without any natural resources. The people were seen as the only resource the new state had, thus managing this resource has since been the main concern of the government, in order for them to build a coherent and efficient nation-state. (Hudson 2013, 36- 37.) The government turned Singapore's challenges into its strength, and so the discourse of a "vulnerable nation" and constantly looming crisis of disunity became a fundamental feature of the Singaporean nation.

To answer the lack of homogeneity and cultural commonalities integral for nation-states, the government promoted the idea of "unity in diversity". This is thought to

bring cohesion in multi-ethnic societies. Furthermore, the government turned the idea into an entire ideology. The disunity of the nation would be a great threat for everyone (Ang & Stratton 1995, 80-1). As the nation was imagined to be fragile, fear became a resource for nation-building and social control in Singapore. Through-out the years, there has been a fear of communism, of slow economy, of both population increase and decrease, of racial violence, of Westernization and spread of liberal values, and lastly, a fear of lack of national identity and inappropriate national behavior. This means that the society and its people themselves are imagined to be the biggest threat to a durable nation. (Hudson 2013, 39.)

Historically Singapore has always been in transition: from colony to a post-colonial state, and all the way to a booming first-world economy in 50 years. This is also embedded in its national narrative, which focuses on fragility and survival in the face of constant societal changes. (Velayutham 2007, 27). The government is constantly reminding people that developing shared national identity and sustaining economic development are crucial for the survival of Singapore (Sim 2011, 747).

With this kind of discourse the state has been able to change its policies and mobilize people to support the government's aims at relatively short notice (Velayutham 2007, 12.) This discourse also shapes and institutes the acceptance of government's capitalist and pragmatic approaches to nation building. The idea of "not having any other choice than to do what the government thinks is the best" is well embedded in the reality of life in Singapore (Sidhu 2003, 174.)

Alongside the government, the protagonist of The Singapore Story is the pioneer generation: the immigrants who had settled in Singapore and contributed in building the nation together. This "Pioneer Spirit" is something the government wants to transmit to the younger generation. As most young Singaporeans grew up in an affluent and comfortable era, the government wants to remind them of the work and scarifices their parents and older generation have had to go through (Tarulevicz 2010, 26). Some think that the young Singaporeans are merely enjoying the fruits while the older Singaporeans ones have had a first-hand experience of how

Singapore went from rags to riche; how hard everyone had worked alongside the government for that to happen. The young people in the present times do not share these experiences.

To fix this disjuncture between old and young generations' different national life experiences, and for the national narrative to be justified, the state has had to instill the national discourse to young Singaporeans already in their childhood. One way to do this has been the National Education curriculum implemented in schools since 1997. The national education plays a big part in shaping the collective memory of young Singaporeans. This education started already in primary schools and subsequently introduced upwards to the college level. The argument for the curriculum has been that since the young Singaporeans do not share the experience of hardships, and do not recognize the vulnerable nature of the society, the government has to "shape their attitudes" for them to "understand how we got to where we are" (Tarulevicz 2010, 31).

According to Ministry of Education (MoE), the aim of National Education is

> "…to develop national cohesion, cultivate instinct for survival as a nation, and instill in our students confidence in our nation's future by fostering a sense of identity, pride and self-respect as Singaporeans"

The key to this is that the students have to acquire the knowledge of the Singapore story and understand "how Singapore succeeded against the odds to become a nation", and to recognize

> "Singapore's unique challenges, constraints and vulnerabilities, which make us different from other countries"

This instillation of the core values of how a Singaporean way of life should be, is presumed to ensure the continued success and well-being of Singapore. The emphasis is on the unique nature of Singaporean society and the constant need for cohesion and confidence for the sake of the future. In addition, the official messages of National Education tell the story of vulnerability, as these extracts reveal:

> "We take pride in shaping our own unique way of life"
> "We find our own way to survive and prosper, turning challenge into opportunity"
> "We are proud to defend Singapore ourselves, no one else is responsible for our security and well-being"

> "We value our diversity and are determined to stay a united people"
> "United, determined and well-prepared, we have what it takes to build a bright future for ourselves, and to progress together as one nation."

With this discourse of a vulnerable nation, Singaporeans are directed to a constant national soul searching exercise as a way for the state to demand people to be self-reflecting and conscious of their nationness (Velayutham 2007, 39; Koh 2005, 76). It has also been the driving idea and legitimation behind the social engineering and strict population control politics in Singapore. The discourse of crisis and survival has been maintained through the 50 years of history, and works as a strategy for the government to sustain its ideological control over the nation (Hudson 2013, 39; Nasir & Turner 2013, 436; Sidhu 2002; Brown 1998). Such instilled national ethos has encouraged Singaporeans to work hard for their country and made the society into what is today (Yao 2007, 47).

## 4.2 Multicultural discourse – Unity in diversity

One of the first challenges for the new state was to unite the culturally and ethnically diverse population. However, the government focused first on developing the economic and infrastructural basis of the state and "postponed the nationhood". (Kwok & Ali 1998, 113). The nation building was also "de-culturalised" as the government did not want to emphasize any ethnic tradition or heritage over another. Thus the state adopted the common unity-in-diversity approach to ensure that people could form a coherent nation. (Chua 1995, 30-1.) With this new constitution, all groups are guaranteed equality, access to public services and infrastructures, and the same rights and responsibilities that everyone has inherited, as the new state was declared to be multiracial, multilingual, multi-religious, and multicultural (Ackermann 1997, 456).

However, to control the heterogeneity of the population, and various ethnic communities and dialect groups, people were officially categorized into four ethnic groups. Following the census categories used by British colonial rule, people were marked as Chinese, Malay, Indian or Others (mainly Eurasians). This is commonly known as CMIO-model. These categories structure one's identity both in legal and social ways and solidify culturally mixed backgrounds (Ong 2005, 7). Every group

has its own allocated mother language, while English is the second language and also the language in education (Siddique 1990, 36.) The different religions and traditional festivals of these groups are equally respected e.g. in terms of public holidays (Chua 2003, 61).

Ethnicity, or race, is thus institutionalized and the categories are relevant also in daily life (Siddique 1990, 37). A Singaporean's race is stated in ID cards, and in school one has to study the respective mother language. Also the public housing blocks have racial quotas, which follow the percentual proportion of ethnic groups of the total population. Racial category is inherited and determined by one's father, which ensures that the four categories are maintained and reproduced automatically despite possible mixed marriage. This means that any mixed ethnicities are officially dismissed. The CMIO scheme is also encoded in every cultural sphere from food and clothes to arts and entertainment (Chua 2003, 74), as almost everything can be easily indicated belonging to certain culture.

Ethnic categorization is therefore a way for the state to control multiculturalism by using race as a tool of governance and a form of social control (Chua 2003). These categories are the basis of a Singaporean's understanding of multiculturalism and an essential part of Singaporeanness itself. Ethnicity offers multiple identities to be Singaporean, but also limits the emergence of the possible supra-ethnic national identification of being only Singaporean without ethnic affixes (Siddique 1990, 37; also Eriksen 1993).

This multicultural discourse in Singapore is in fact quite narrow. The fixed ethnic categories ignore that there are 35% foreigners in the country, who might not fit into this model. In Living with Myths –seminar on 14th of February in 2015, Dr. Christine Han shared, that in schools young Singaporeans understood multiculturalism according to CMIO-model. Han points out further that there should be wider understanding of plural society in Singapore and cites London's diversity as an example.

The vast debate of immigration in Singapore also indicates this tendency. Despite the multicultural approach deeply embedded in the society, there are limits to who might and can be accepted into the racial structure. The CMIO-model affects clearly to the immigration patterns, since it is in the government's interest to maintain the racial balance and integrate immigrants in the existing model (Nasir & Turner 2014, 14; 28). This explains the amount of Chinese, Malaysian, Indonesian, and Indian immigrants in Singapore. However, Singaporean social scientist Hong Liu (2014) argues that co-ethnicity and common cultural heritage play little role in shaping local Singaporeans' view of the current diaspora groups in the country. A Chinese permanent resident would not be seen as Singaporean. Despite being an immigrant society where everyone's ancestry is somewhere else, the celebrated diversity is limited only to Singaporeans.

### 4.3 Cosmopolitan discourse – Eastern values, Western lifestyle

Post-colonial Singapore faced a dilemma: how to adopt the Western modernity but also defend the Asian traditions and values? Singapore's mental position between East and West has posed a problem for nation building. It is important to understand that not only the colonial history, but also the politics of national and cultural development have made Singapore both an Eastern and Western country. Eastern cultural influences are nowadays represented mainly in local practices, traditions and values. (Ho, Debbie 2006, 18.) Western influences originate from the colonial times and are emphasized to maintain Singapore's place in global economy and modern, Western world.

The government's dilemma is that the West also represents moral decay and cultural regression in relation to Eastern Asian aspects of the nation (Yao 2007, 53). Ang & Sratton (1995, 72) call this "the bastard complex of Singapore's Western parentage". In 1980's there was a growing concern about how the global and Western influences might affect the Singaporean mind-set and functioning as a nation. The solution was the culturalization of economic and political issues (Sidhu 2003, 176). PM Lee Kuan Yew made a distinction between soft and hard cultures, the latter referring to East Asian cultures, which are tough, resilient and economically successful (Hudson 2013, 18). This defined Singapore more as a

Chinese country despite the multicultural politics, and Chinese culture has indeed claimed to be the practical and ideological basis for Singapore's success. Lee Kuan Yew did not hide his fondness of Chinese and Confucian heritage over other ethnic cultures in Singapore, despite this kind of favoring was officially denied in constitution (Hudson 2013, 26-28).

In 1990's the fight against the spread of decadent Western values continued with a new tactic. The PM Goh Chok Tong demanded for a new national ideology on which "to anchor a Singaporean identity" (Yao 2007, 21). In 1991 a *White Paper on Asian values* was declared to correct the national and cultural direction of Singaporeanness. The Confucian values of self-discipline, hard work, filial responsibility, and respect of authority were declared as cultural dimension and basis of Singaporean nation. Official five values were:

i) the nation before community and individual
ii) family as the basic unit of the society
iii) community supporting for their individuals
iv) racial and religious harmony
v) consensus in policy making (Yao 2007, 21).

These Asian values have been used to explain the success and achievements of other economies of Asian Tigers too, as "Asian interpretation of modernity" (Velayutham 2007, 4). This constructed national culture functions as a strategy for political control, when culture is used to explain the functioning of a society (Ong 2005, 17-19).

The state wants to produce the Asian kind of "good culture" embodied in individual behavior, which would then collectively represent national Singaporean identity (Yao 2007, 72). In a sense, Singapore is trying to be non-Western although it has already been westernized from the very beginning of its national history (Ang & Stratton 1995, 67). This cultural complexity is problematic for national ideology, as Singapore is neither Western nor Eastern enough to be culturally coherent nation. It also makes national identity to be signified negatively and as defective (ibid, 71). Furthermore, this ambivalence has significantly shaped the social and political reality of Singapore (ibid, 71).

Besides promoting of Asian values and rejecting Western influences, the state has also tried to combine these two approaches so that people's sense of the nation ought to be both global and cosmopolitan, local and patriotic at the same time. People should have a cosmopolitan national spirit, as Singapore is made to be a global playground, where people are expected to embrace globalization and cosmopolitanism (Yeoh 2004, 2436). The western modernity, urban lifestyle, and materialistic consumption should be enjoyed while being thoroughly Asian national subjects (Yao 2007, 73). Officially cosmopolitanism in Singapore is defined as a quality of someone "who is familiar with global trends and lifestyles and feels comfortable working and living in Singapore as well as overseas" (Singapore 21 Committee).

There are clearly two contradictory expectations for Singaporean national identity. The younger generation is seen especially to be inclined towards the Western values and lifestyle, which makes them lacking the ideal Singaporean identity. For the state's perspective, national identity should be fixed and unchanging; any hybridity signals the lack of such national identity, which again threatens national unity (Ang & Stratton 1995, 80-1). This is also why the government has ignored the hybrid sociological realities of Singaporean everyday life (Velayutham 2007, 39), as will be highlighted in my analysis.

## 4.4 Pragmatic discourse - A gift of social life

Classic theories of nationalism have often concluded that nationalism is a product of modern conditions. In Singapore, the government has attempted to create those conditions that would advance the emergence of homogenous national identity (Velayutham 2007, 43) and has been admittedly successful in it in the sense that Singapore is the most modernized country in Southeast Asia. The nation building has been guided above all by pragmatic politics where any action that aids economic development is good and legitimated (Chua 1995). Unlike other former colonies of Southeast Asia, Singapore has maintained close cultural and economic connections with its colonial powers and embraced capitalism, whereas the neighboring countries have fought against capitalist exploitation of their resources (Sidhu 2003, 173-4).

The cultural development of Singaporean nation has also been very pragmatic, as it should not jeopardize the economic progress (Chua 1995, 105; Chang 2012, 693). The government has been actively creating national identity, which would fit and respond to global economic demands. Cultural practices have to be modified so that they would not hinder development, and Singaporean citizens should have appropriate attitudes to labor and consumption. (Hudson 2013, 25.) By creating a sense of prosperous future and embedding a developmentalist ideology to the people, the government has assured that they would be prepared to pay the cost, however high for the progress of the nation-state. The result has been goal-orientated meritocratic society, a system that rewards those who succeed and perform the best (Hudson 2013, 27; Chua 2000, 186).

Also the social conditions of Singaporean society are disciplined in order to create an economically efficient nation (Chua 2000, 186). Deriving from the discourse of vulnerability as much as from pragmatism, the state exercises strong social engineering to control the imagined, looming national crisis. The promise of economic prosperity, improvement of Singaporeans living standards, and delivering of material goods and well-being has been a powerful ideological tool for the government to legitimate its social engineering and interventions, and even the limitations of individual freedom and press censorship (Wee 2001, 238). The government has indeed gained strong support from the people in this sense (Velayutham 2007, 30).

Even the multicultural CMIO-model falls under the logic of economics, as cultural hybridity would interfere the nation-building project, which focuses on developing an internationally competitive entrepreneurial culture (Sidhu 2003, 197.) For example, the bilingual language policy works as an argument for economic progress. English provides cosmopolitan cultural capital, making migration and working in other countries an easy option. (Plüss 2009, 200.) On the other hand, the Chinese emphasis on culture and society also implies the importance of strong economic and diplomatic relations with China.

The life of Singaporeans has been politicized when the government has intervened in almost every aspect of social life: housing, education, culture, language, reproduction and family life, religion, car ownership, the keeping of pets, buying chewing gum, flushing the toilet… you name it (Hudson 2013, 34-5.) According to Chua (1995, 204), the relationship between the people and the government is so-called father-knows-best leadership. Sociologists Nasir & Turner (2014) have named it as *soft authoritanism*, when citizen's duties are more important than rights, there is low trust between leaders and electorate, and state is guiding and shaping people's voluntary private choices. They also use a metaphor of gardening to describe the relationship between political leadership and society: it is about weeding out the ones who do not fit and cultivating the others with education and Asian values (ibid, 34).

The regime is both economically liberal, politically authoritarian and communitarian (Nasir & Turner 2013, 344). There is a mutual obligation between the state and citizens, as the state provides "a gift of social life" and expects loyalty and commitment in return from the citizens (Velayutham 2007, 162). Singaporeans are like subjects, whose loyalty and support for the government is reciprocated by protecting and provision (Sim 2011, 758). The government assumes that strong economy is sufficient basis for a good life, and that Singaporeans favor the right for better life over political ideology. The official narrative of this reciprocity (safety, security and prosperity in exchange for economic discipline and social conformity) has been the basis of the nation formation (ibid, 747-8), and it still affects to the young Singaporeans view of the nation, as I will show in my analysis.

## 4.5 Singapore today

Today's Singapore is an example of a country where either ethnic diversity or globalization has not inhibited the development of nation-state (Brown 1998, 35), even though they have been generally regarded to be major obstacles for national ideology. Above I have explained how Singapore has responded to the challenges of nation-building. But where is Singapore now? Has the government succeeded in its efforts to create a sense of Singaporeanness that would bind the heterogeneous population together?

Since 1990's Asian values –discourse, the government has taken even stronger and more active political stance on national identity issues. The discourses of home, roots, and sense of belonging have taken place of the plain pragmatic and economic reasoning for the nation (Ortmann 2009, 31; Sidhu 2003). The state is now trying to underline Singaporean's emotional ties and roots to the nation while they are "global citizens" (Sidhu 2003, 176-8). On a National Day speech the PM Goh Chok Tong (2002) asked Singaporeans to decide whether they are "stayers or quitters". This provocation was intended to question the emotional attachment and the national sense of belonging Singaporeans should have to their home country if they plan to emigrate.

The lack of patriotism and national identification is nowadays an important political issue, as the government has identified "a social and political apathy" among the "most globalized" younger generation (Kluver & Weber 2003, 381). More recently, the so-called SG50-initiatives to celebrate Singapore's 50th Jubilee year in 2015 have mainly concentrated on forging a sense of national belonging and coherent national identity among Singaporeans. These national identity campaigns target mainly the younger generation of Singaporeans who are also the focus of my study.

Political scientist David Brown (1998, 42) has argued, that despite widespread skepticism towards the government's "nationalist propaganda", majority of Singaporeans seem to be quite responsive to it. On the other hand, more recently political economist Stephan Ortmann has claimed that instead of blindly accepting nationalism promoted by the government, part of the population is developing alternative idea of Singaporeanness, which rejects the notions of socio-political control, one-party supremacy, and the idea of cosmopolitanism (Ortmann 2009, 36).

Due to the influx of immigrants, Singaporean's concerns about the future and relevance of the nation have been concretized. Around 35% of the inhabitants of the city-state are non-Singaporeans, and the number is expected to grow. The government's *White Paper on Immigration* published in 2013 suggested that in 2030 there would be 6.9 million people living in the island. Singaporeans low birth rate and lack of workforce are compensated with immigrants, who would make nearly

half of the population in the future. These plans triggered a massive demonstration against immigration policies on 16 February 2013, as Singaporeans are worried of their rights and position in their homeland. (BBC 2013.)

In summary, Singapore's nation-building is based on the very classic nationalist ideology, but due to being a post-colonial multi-ethnic city-state, the official national discourses have provided some interesting dimensions. The economic survival and success in global world is important for Singaporean state, and also forms the basis of nationhood and legitimates the state's strong hold over its people lives. National identity should be based both on Eastern values and Western influences, and despite being racially categorized, people should identify themselves only Singaporeans.

The national discourses rely on the idea of Singaporeans who are actors in this scheme. Sociologists Kwok & Ali (1998, 113) suggest that it would be insightful to look at the formation of the Singaporean nationhood rather as a human aspiration and as a cultural question. It seems that the Singaporeans as people of a nation have been forgotten in the nation-building process and there has been little understanding and consideration of the people's daily experiences and notions of the nation. The government believed that a sense of national belonging would not develop naturally in a society like Singapore, so it had to be consciously constructed (Ortmann 2009, 27-31). In this sense the whole nation is a product of social engineering.

> "Nationalism never exists apart from the discourse that constitutes it." (Calhoun 1997, 6).

Nationalist discourses are part of the cultural understanding and rhetoric that frame people's aspirations and ideas of nation and national identity (ibid). In the next three chapters I will analyze Singaporeanness as a human aspiration, from the perspective of my informants. The discourses presented here will work as a framework for the analysis. With my ethnographic examples from the everyday life, I will also further demonstrate how these discourses actualize in the life of my informants.

# 5 Pragmatic life under authoritarian rule

Nationalism is not only a political ideology of a state, but a lived and produced experience that gives meaning to life (Kapferer 1981). People of a nation are supposed to have common cultural and national experiences in their daily life, which bring them together as a nation and create a mutual feeling of belonging. In this first chapter of analysis I will discuss about the authoritarian nature, social engineering and economic pragmatism of Singaporean society, and how my informants connect these factors to Singaporeanness.

Writer Tayie Selasi says that the experiences in a certain place make one local, not the official national statuses or citizenships. Singapore is a particular place to reflect this idea, as it is a compact city-state that inhabits people from various ethnic, cultural and national backgrounds. Based on my ethnographic observations, I analyze what are those experiences that makes one not only local, but a *Singaporean* local.

Many of my informants concluded that one has to be "born and bred" in Singapore in order to be regarded as Singaporean. This might seem quite obvious statement for any nationality, but I argue that it has a particular significance in Singapore, where general markers of nationality, like mutual language, ethnicity, religion and traditions, are non-existent, and the amount of foreign inhabitants is increasing. One has to understand and have first-hand experience of growing up and living in the social, political and economic realities of Singapore, to be considered as a Singaporean.

## 5.1 Living in a nanny-state

The Singaporean state is a combination of authoritarian regime and liberal capitalist economy (see chapter 4.4). Observing the relationship between everyday life and state authority is thus rather interesting. In the beginning of my fieldwork I wanted to avoid talking about Singaporean politics with my informants, as it was not in my interest to include political issues in my thesis. Very soon I noticed that it was impossible as the government, i.e. PAP, got mentioned almost always at some point.

Some of my informants expressed subtle anxiety over this social and political reality of their everyday life. Freedom of speech and expression of ones opinions, and restricted life choices came up in our conversations, as we ended up comparing life in Singapore and in Finland, or in other countries where some of them had lived for a while.

Because of the extensive socio-political interventions, the state is literally everywhere and "creeps into any serious conversation about anything in Singapore" (Chua 2003, 117). My informant Andre, a 25-year-old Chinese-Singaporean, said to me before our first meeting that he does not want to talk about politics as he "minded his own business". However, later on he gladly brought political issues to the table himself. It was hard to avoid political topics when my informants told about their life in Singapore. Singaporean-Malay Amin, 24, on the other hand was always eager to talk about politics and stated that,

> "…if you want to understand Singaporeans, you have to understand Lee Kuan Yew and PAP".

There is a culture of fear in Singapore, which stems from the fact that any public affair and opposing opinion about such is deemed to be political (Kwok & Ali 1998, 122). Singaporean-Chinese Michelle, 21, explained to me how Singaporeans fear to get entangled in the very strict laws and how "everyone here lives a very safe life and don't want to take any risk in any situation". Andre's comment about minding his own business and Michelle's explanation refer to the restricted freedom of speech in Singapore. Some of the locals I met were even concerned about my research topic, as they felt that it is daring, or not so wise to write about nation building or Singaporean's sense of belonging. Some were surprised when I told that there are lots of studies about the topic in NUS libraries. Although, I was told at ARI that the researchers have to come up with creative ways to express their opinion and write out their findings in order to pass the censorship.

There is clearly an understanding that some issues cannot be publicly spoken about in Singapore. Hudson (2013, 34) argues that "every Singaporean understands the limits of what can be said" and the possible legal consequences even though it is nothing but clear where the boundaries are. The mechanism of control is very vague

in Singapore and that is the art in it; the boundaries are not clearly defined until they are crossed (Bokhorst-Heng 2002, 563). This has become clear when some Singaporean bloggers have been prosecuted for crossing this line online. The Internal Security Act permits detention without formal charges, and Singapore is ranked 153rd out of 174 countries by freedom of speech (World Press Freedom Index 2015).

In March 2015, after former PM Lee Kuan Yew's funeral, Amos Yee, a 17-year-old Singaporean boy uploaded a video on YouTube where he criticized Lee and compared him to Jesus. He was arrested and charged. After this, there has been lots of debate of what can be said aloud and what not. Especially the debate about Lee Kuan Yew's legacy seemed to divide Singaporeans on two camps: those who wanted to be critical about Lee's dictatorial actions, and those who thought that even his most radial policies of control were reasonable in the name benefitting the nation. The price of having safe and efficient nation is to give up one's right to criticize and there should be no need to question the government's policies, interventions and actions, as they are in the end for best of the nation.

This climate of fear and restricted expressing of opinions was noticeable but also self-explanatory for my informants in a sense that they themselves recognized this aspect being part of the Singaporean society. One has to adjust and live in the midst of this political reality. In Living with Myths –seminar on 24th of October 2014, researcher Elaine Ho wanted to underline how "Singaporeans are not docile bodies". There is a popular stereotype about Singaporeans being like sheep living under authoritarian rule and not speaking up. However, many of informants took this more with bantering. My Singaporean friend who usually joined me in the Living with Myths -seminars was joking that he would get in trouble if the government caught him attending such events.

The common attitude seemed to be that this is how Singapore is and you just have to deal with it. This is also part of Singaporeanness in a sense that only those who grew up in Singaporean society are able to understand and tolerate it. In a humorous

listing of "How to Piss off a Singaporean" (Seah 2013) one point is that one should not assume that Singaporeans are politically ignorant:

> "Talking about Singaporean politics is only exciting when you've lived here long enough to know its nuances, so excuse us if we don't bother trying to clue you tourists in".

Another popular claim is that there is no proper culture of political participation in Singapore. Ortmann (2009, 42) argues that while many Singaporeans "long for greater participation, most have become convinced that nothing can be changed". Singaporean online writer and blogger Visankanv (2011) argues that the young Singaporeans feel that they do not have stake on their own country, as they have not had any role in nation building and no chance to affect it. According to historian Nicole Tarulevicz (2010), there is not really a proper democratic movement in Singapore, even though historically young people have often facilitated social changes, and in other Southeast Asia countries there are potential forces on the move. Also as I was discussing about these issues with my informants, few of them expressed anxiety over illiberal democracy. When asking about how they see the political future of Singapore, they hesitated to give an opinion and "I don't know" was the most common answer, and no one was eager to speculate politics more than that.

According to social scientists Kluver & Weber (2003, 381), the constrained possibilities to criticize or affect the government policies pushes young Singaporeans to renegotiate their national identification as they are more inclined to appropriate foreign (e.g. Western) cultural forms and emigrate form the country. Some of my informants frankly told about their desire to live somewhere else, where life would be less restricted and controlled by the state. Interestingly, a Singaporean man in his mid-40's said to me that those who have lived abroad would have a greater sense of national belonging because they start to respect the life in Singapore. The ones who stay "think that the grass is greener on the other side". This was also something that seemed to divide Singaporeans, as some said the opposite: once you see something else, you understand the downsides of living in Singapore.

The topic of Living with Myths –seminar on 18th of December 2014 was "Apathy" that Singaporeans are presumed to have towards social and political concerns (also Kluver & Weber 2003, 381). Similar to vulnerable nation, the myth of apathy and backwardness of both Singapore and Singaporeans is a story the government maintains to justify its policies and control over "apathetic" Singaporeans. Historian Loh Kah Seng gave a presentation titled "Apathy, or How History is written by elites" (Living with Myths) in which he claimed that apathy is a key aspect of Singaporean identity. There is a lack of interest and action among Singaporeans towards the government's initiatives, and this apathy has worked as a handle for elite-led social changes. The implemented policies are repeated in narratives and myths so that the need for their continuation is guaranteed. According to this myth, after becoming independent, Singaporeans were apathetic and lacked interest to contribute in nation-building, so the government had to take charge of things and start taking care of the people with its intensive social policies. PAP changed the disorganized colonial city to organized nation-state. (Loh 2014.)

The discourse of vulnerable nation gets real and reproduced in the discursive talk about the nation. The extensive social engineering and the government intervening even the most intimate issues in life are justified in this national discourse. I did recognize this mythical aspect of Singaporeanness sometimes in my informants talk, as they explained to me how they understand the government's interventions as necessary for Singapore:

> "I like the government, they do a good job. It's difficult to govern a country like this so they have to do those things…. The state is acquiring the land 'cause it's scare. Otherwise people would just take everything to themselves" - Michelle, 21 (conversation)

> "The CPF[6] is good 'cause people don't know who to spend their money." - Rachel, 31 (conversation)

Anthropologist Souchou Yao (2007) argues that this is part of the national culture in Singapore. Singaporeans are made to feel that the government's efforts and achievements are needed and good life cannot be taken for granted (ibid, 26).

[6] CPF is a compulsory savings plan for Singaporeans to fund their retirement, health care and housing needs.

Herzfeld (2005, 2) says that by contributing to the essentialising and producing of dominant narratives, people are legitimizing the authority of the state in their lives. The state is treated like a living human being and at the same time seen as impersonal and disinterested authority (ibid, 5.) Anthropologist Konstantinos Kalantzis (2014) elaborates Herzfeld's idea by focusing on the negotiations of agency that the dominant formulations enable. I see this kind of schema happening also in Singapore. The authoritarian nature of the state enables the dominant national discourses to be strongly present in people's lives, which leads to the fact that in order to understand Singaporeanness, we must not underestimated the role of the state in defining it. However, this does not mean that the people would blindly adopt the dominant definitions. The conversations where my informants expressed and reflected their anxiety over authoritarian rule reveal their sentiments and understanding of Singaporeanness. Later in chapter 6.2 I will contemplate these issues more.

This specific nature of Singaporean society is something that one is supposed to cherish. It contributes towards the creating of the national framework for life. Aihwa Ong (2005, 22-23) argues that this biopolitical relationship forms an implicit social contract between the people and the state. The government promises to respond to people's *will* to have safe, clean, efficient society with home and work for everyone, but then they have to vote PAP and be loyal to it. According to Ong, this exchange and responding of people's created and imagined wills explains why Singaporeans tolerate the dictatorial and totalitarian society. (Ibid)

## 5.2 Public housing - socially engineered belonging

> "People's sense of belonging comes from the HDB areas because that's where we grew up" - Jason, 26 (conversation)

As a city-state, Singapore is a physically small place for a nation to exist. The public space get easily more intimate meaning, and taking into account the authoritarian nature, it is also more prone to state interventions. One good example of social engineering and "pastoral power" (Sidhu 2003, 174) the government exercises in Singapore is the public housing program, commonly known as HDB (Housing Development Board). Apart the buildings being a single major physical landmark

and impossible to ignore when visiting Singapore, the public housing program is world famous and admittedly very successful. Besides the fact that HDB system is widely studied also in social sciences, the housing issues were also one of the major themes I ended up discussing with my informants. In the opening quote Jason, a 26-year-old Singaporean-Chinese, expressed how the HDB scheme is in fact the foundation of Singaporeans sense of belonging.

Nowadays, around 80% of Singaporeans (HDB InfoWEB 2015) live in government-own public housing estates with 99-year lease. In the 70's the government established the Housing Development Board to rationalize the use of space on a small island. They decided to demolish *kampongs*[7] where people used to live, and resettle them to newly build apartments. By 1976 around 63,000 kampong and squatter households had been resettled in mostly high-rise buildings. (Hudson 2013, 45.) In one generation the government made sure there were no homeless or squatters, and no poor ghettos and ethnic enclaves (Liu 2015). HDB scheme was also much about nation building, as one of its goals was to unify the new nation across ethnic lines. Each building block has racial quotas, which match the percentage of every ethnic group within the population. In a news article Liu Thai Ker, the "master planner" of HDB, states:

> "The whole idea was to have the Chinese not thinking that they were Chinese, or the Malays thinking they're Malay, or Indians thinking they're Indian. We want them to think as one Singaporean" (Leyl 2015).

Besides solving the problem of multiculturalism and homelessness, public housing has also other symbolic functions (Koh 2005, 54). When traveling around the little island of Singapore, one cannot ignore the unique housing architecture. Everywhere around there are more or less identical, sometimes very colorful high-rise buildings reminding Lego blocks. They look no more than few decades old as facades are well maintained. The first floor of the block is an open space, with maybe a kiosk and tables for people to spend their time there. The idea is that the residents could meet and interact in these empty spaces. Sometimes Chinese funerals or Malay weddings are held on void decks, although less today than before. Under the windows there

[7] Kampong means a small village or community of houses in Malay language.

are long poles sticking out from the wall, where residents hang their laundry. On the open-air corridors some doorways are decorated with Chinese lanterns, pictures of Hindu gods or symbols of Islam.

There is always a *kopitiam* or hawker centre[8] nearby, where locals often have their lunch and dinner. There are playgrounds between the buildings and usually the pavement and walkways leading to MRT or bus stop are roofed, so that in case of rain (which occurs basically every day) no one will get wet. In every area there are also community centers and some neighborhoods resemble small towns with their pedestrian streets full of shops. According to many studies, HDB housing is a masterpiece of pragmatic architecture and social engineering. The blocks are designed to be social spaces where people could easily interact with each other. These HDB areas are also called the "heartlands" of Singapore.

The most concrete aspect of the HDB program I discussed with my informants was the housing arrangements. Many of my friends were unwillingly living with their parents or relatives, even though they were almost 30 years old and working full-time. Usually the explanation was the high cost of living: very few could afford the private properties in Singapore. The private condominiums are known to be filled with foreign expatriates and the most affluent Singaporeans, so the HDB flat is the only possible choice.

Besides this financial aspect, the explanation for housing conditions is a bit more deep-rooted: only singles over 35 years old can apply for an HDB flat on their own. Otherwise one has to have a family or spouse to get the own flat with. Renting and sharing apartment with friends is also rare, even though it would be possible. The applicants also have to have a steady income to buy the flat. (HDB InfoWEB 2015). My informant Rahmat, a 31-year-old Singaporean Malay, explained how he was impatiently waiting for "coming of age" and being able to purchase his own place. He already looked for possible apartments and made furnishing plans. Some of my informants probably had enough savings and income already, but they could not buy

[8] Kopitiam is a traditional coffee shop. Hawker centre is an open-air food court full of small stalls selling inexpensive local food.

a flat as single. This deeply institutionalized link between family, housing and employment is a good example of social engineering, which allows the government to define the ideal national subjectivities and norms around Singaporeanness by controlling household formation (Nasir & Turner 2014, 69; 74-5; Hudson 2013, 117).

In Living with Myths on 21st of November, historian Koh Keng We questioned the relevance of HDB system nowadays, as the need for it is another myth based on state's aim to control the population by providing housing for everyone and to have a hold on the population economically and socially. One good example is the constant upgrading of HDB buildings. My informant Jason, a 26-year old engineer, took me to Hougang, which is the one of the few areas where the opposition has won in the latest general elections. I asked Jason what difference it makes if the area is under PAP or the opposition. He thought for a while and said, "I'm not sure… But there is no upgrading."

Insightful in his comment is that according to both anthropologist Souchou Yao (2007, 184), and geographer Shaun Teo (2014, 920), upgrading is part of maintaining the government's political legitimacy and creating a sense of national community and space of Singaporeanness in HDB areas. This is also connected to the myth of vulnerability and need for state interventions in a sense that by voting the opposition party, there is presumed chance that the area turns into a slum (Yao 2007, 184; Teo 2014, 931), as Jason also implied. Jason told me about his business trips to New York and Shanghai, where he was rather shocked about the homeless people on the streets. These trips had made him respect the Singaporean living conditions. These conditions are thought to be maintained by PAP, so the government gets associated to progress and development and opposition to unsure future, which also tells something about how the authoritarian rule works in Singapore.

These heartlands with HDB's, kopitiams, neighborhood schools, business premises, and sport facilities are indeed seen as places where one is believed to get the greatest and most genuine feeling of Singaporeanness. The term "heartlanders"

popularly refers to the Singaporeans, who live in HDB's and are sticking to their ethnic traditions, respecting authority, speaking colloquial language (Singlish) and concentrating on their daily life full of work and concerns about children's education (Ho, Elaine 2006). The local-global dichotomy assumes that Singaporeans living in the heartlands are the opposite of cosmopolitan Singaporeans who are heading abroad and aspiring to cosmopolitan lifestyle. (Ibid, 388-9.) In his study about urban liveability Teo (2014, 928) concludes that heartlanders are marginalized from Singapore's aspiration to be a global city, and they experience difficulty to connect with the larger structures and global spaces of the nation. Heartlanders should be the ones carrying and producing Singaporeanness in comparison to the cosmopolitans. According to Robbie Goh (2005, 54), heartlands and public housing system address the clash between global and local discourses and identities, which I will discuss more in chapter 6.4.

In summary, the public housing system contributes to the sense of national belonging in many levels. It is the government's tool for social engineering, controlling the multicultural population and creating ideal family forms. It also contributes to the dichotomy of global and local in Singaporean. HDB can also be seen as a source for the feeling of Singaporeanness due to its unique architecture and character, and as a place for Singaporeanness in the midst of rapid development and changing demographics. I argue, that the HDB program with its various impacts on people and their lives is part of creating the national reality that 80% of Singaporean HDB-dwellers live in. As was expressed in Jason's quote in the beginning, growing up in the heartlands is part of nationalized experience. Also the accepted form of an ideal family enforced with public housing program contributes in constructing the idea of being Singaporean. The national framework of authoritanism and social engineering makes the sense of belonging to a Singaporean nation reasonable. This also implies how nationhood can frame people's choices and opportunities radically (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008, 537-8).

## 5.3 Pragmatic nation

"Everything is fake here. Everybody knows it" – Ian, 31 (conversation)

After two months in Singapore, we did a day trip to a nearby island Pulau Ubin with my friends. We rented bikes and cycled around on dirt roads, swam in an old quarry lake and saw wild boars. I suddenly realized how much I had missed *wild* nature. In Singapore even the nature seems well planned, measured structured and immaculate. Singapore is surprisingly green place, officially a "Garden City", where every road, tree, and plant has their own, given places. Everything seems brand-new and older buildings are constantly upgraded. My Singaporean friend mentioned how European cities fascinate her because you can see and sense the history as the buildings might be hundreds of years old. As I walked around the local neighborhoods with my Singaporean friends they usually pointed me what used to be somewhere or how the area had changed since their childhood. Even those in their early 20's had already experienced the loss of their physical landscape to rapid changes. The constant progress, development and change are in a sense natural for the younger generation as they are so used to it.

According to Velayutham (2007), the government actively promotes modernity as a marker of nationhood and Singaporeans get the sense of the nation from their actual lived and habituated experience of living in the modern city of Singapore. My informant Ian, a 31-year-old Singaporean-Chinese, concluded that while living in UK he did not miss anything about Singapore. However, he told how he suddenly had a remarkable feeling of home when he visited a big shopping mall in London. He associated the materialist and consumerist place to Singapore, which is also one of the common stereotypes of Singaporeanness. Especially the younger generation is accused to be very materialistic (Koh 2007, 192) and Velayutham (2007, 172) sees that this has led to the fact that the sense of national identity and belonging are imagined through the materiality and the realities of social modernity. This is also something I realized during my fieldwork, as my informants kept explaining how Singaporean infrastructure is something they value above anything else, when discussing about feelings of national belonging.

Despite the previously-mentioned frustration over restricted life, my informants also gave several reasons for why they are proud and grateful for being Singaporeans. They especially acknowledged the privilege of growing up in affluent city-state, compared to other Southeast Asian countries. When discussing what they value in Singapore, what makes them happy to stay there, or what makes them proud, my informants very often referred to very pragmatic and concrete things like good education system, cleanliness, safety and well maintained infrastructure. The public transportation system was especially praised.

Singaporean-Malay Amanda, 24-year-old freshly graduated teacher said she would stay in Singapore for "family, familiarity, comfort, safety, and convenience" but would like to leave for "better job opportunities and a more easy, laid-back, peaceful lifestyle" outside the urban environment. For 21-year-old Michelle life in Singapore is "just plain boring and lifeless" and "way too comfortable" and she feels that the society "lacks humanity". Michelle was an enthusiastic traveler and had big dreams for her life. Singaporean-Chinese Rachel, 31, had lived a year in Australia and was working full time in creative industry. She mentioned that the peacefulness and stability of Singapore make her proud, and that she respects the efficiency resulting from the steady society.

Velayutham (2007) argues that the government's approach to nation building is based on economic developmentalism and pragmatic ideology. The sense of national identity and belonging are created by giving citizens a material stake in the county (ibid, 161). He also claims that the emotional attachment to the nation is somewhat half-hearted and that Singaporeans take pride and identify mainly with the material furnishing of the nation (ibid, 172). I somewhat agree with these arguments, as that is how my informants mainly conceptualized their national belonging, as my informants comments above indicate. However, one aspect in this issue is the also strong discourse of lack of national identity. Member of Parliament Inderjit Singh (2014) mentions in his commentary on an online newspaper that many Singaporeans have difficulties to define what it means to be a Singaporean besides enjoying the country's material and economic achievements:

> "When you ask them what it means to be a Singaporean they turn awkwardly and smile, 'Ermm our food' " (Singh 2014).

Another thing to point here is the possible impact of national education curriculum mentioned in chapter 4.1. Sometimes the conversations especially with my younger informants reflected quite clearly the official statements of NE about what, how, and why Singapore and being Singaporean should be valued. My informant Michelle, 21, told how she is proud to be a Singaporean because of the quick development from third to "first world country with rich assets even though we are just a tiny island". She also emphasized how Singapore has strict laws but is also one of the least corrupted country, and competitive but business-friendly. In many instances, both when talking with my informants and following debates in social media, these aspects of daily life, such as competitiveness and restricted atmosphere are secondary to the material and infrastructural gains given by the state.

Prominent Singaporean political writer Catherine Lim (1994) wrote in a political commentary in national newspaper Strait Times that the government is respected mainly for its efficiency, but is lacking affectionate regard. Lim says the Singaporean government-people relationship is unique, as there is unity of purpose and commitment to boost Singaporean economy, but a serious bifurcation on emotional level when considering the sense of national belonging. Also Yao (2007) has a rather pessimistic view about Singapore as he claims that the state causes feelings of "emotional sterility and oppressive anxiety", even though the same state has also brought wealth and political stability for Singaporeans (ibid, 140).

Velayutham (2007, 175) argues that this kind of pragmatism and materialism can be a source of pride but not a key for deeper affective nationalism. Similarly to the lack of political participation, younger generation of Singaporeans have little to do with the achievements of Singapore. My informant Matthew, 28-year-old Singaporean-Chinese art teacher, said that he is happy about living in a place where everything works, but he cannot "take credit for that though, having never had a hand in it". However, Brown (1998) argues that even if Singaporeans are working hard to improve their standard of life without any significant improvement, they are

likely to identify with the national development and progress, and take pride in them because of the hegemony of communitarian discourse (ibid, 42.)

For Velayutham (2007, 161) this means that the sense of belonging is highly individualized question, and Singaporeans have little interest of developing a collective sense of belonging. The national question is understood mainly in very practical and material terms, as the dominant discourses suggest. Yao (2007) argues, that the social good the government has provided for Singaporeans is turned into national *"social enjoyment".* The good Singaporean life is associated with PAP when its political rule is experienced in everyday level, as enjoyment of things provided. Social peace and material prosperity are signs of the government's good work. (Ibid, 132).

Singapore's national narrative is the story of a struggle to become a modern and prosperous city-state. It is based on people's shared territorial experiences that exceed ethnic or cultural boundaries. National identity is built on this economic progress, as was explained in chapter 4.4, and that became clear to me as I discussed with my informants. For the government this creates little emotional or motivational hold over the people, as pragmatism and opportunism are the main values of presumed national identity, and economic growth and material comforts are promoted as a source of national pride (Koh 2007, 195; Kluver & Weber 2003, 378).

These kinds of economic and material achievements may have symbolic value as cultural and national representations that construct national identity, as Stuart Hall has suggested (Hall 1992, 292; also Koh 2007, 195). However, Kwok & Ali (1998, 117-8) remind that it would be wrong to think that "wealth creation is Singapore's raison d'être" and that being Singaporean would not have any cultural sense. Even though it is easy to come to that conclusion from some of my informants comments, it would be wrong to underestimate the emotional attachment Singaporeans might have for their home, and the deep-rooted meanings of being Singaporean.

In summary, I have argued that the shared experience of way of life, and understanding the political reality of the society are crucial for Singaporeanness, as would be the case with any other society. However, in the Singaporean context, this is highlighted because of the strong political hold the government has over the people, and the existence of strategic and pragmatic national discourse, which defines the national framework and socio-political reality Singaporeans are living in. I argue, that the shared experiences of being born and bred Singaporean is in fact the crucial part of national thinking.

# 6 Imagining Singaporeanness

Nationalist thinking assumes that there are imagined relations between people (Alonso 1994, 384-5). When examining nationalism, it is thus relevant to identify how imagined relations create a feeling that is embodied in material practice and lived experience (ibid, 382). Benedict Anderson (1983) sees nations as imagined communities where people have sense of belonging to a group of people without knowing each other. Anderson's idea has been both praise and criticized, but works the main idea of imagination still works as a good starting point for understanding communities.

In this chapter I examine the imagined community of Singaporeans. I will continue to analyze the previously presented discourse of vulnerable nation, and how it actualizes in the understanding of Singaporeanness. Together with an example of national characteristics, I will consider how Singaporeanness is conceptualized in popular speech. Drawing these two perspectives together will give a contradictory conclusion about the Singaporean community, if in fact it can be imagined or otherwise.

When discussing about national identity and sense of belonging, with my informants and any Singaporean or someone living there, almost every conversation inevitably lead to the conclusion these matters are complex, confusing and unfinished issues in Singapore. However, the urgent need to create, maintain and boost Singaporean identity was also self-evident. "We aren't there yet" or claims such as "it takes time for an identity to form" revealed the pragmatic approach to the whole issue (also Koh 2005, 78). These comments also contribute to the modernist idea how national identification is seen as some sort of development and goal to achieve.

State's speech about lack of national identity is well imprinted in the idea of Singaporeanness. However on the other hand I found out that there are some instances and ideas that my informants were defining as Singaporean things. Therefore I am asking if there is some code for national identification that Singaporeans express. Is there a Singaporean national culture? Following Stuart Hall

(2002, 28), are there some cultural meanings embedded in imagined community in Singapore?

## 6.1 "There are no Singaporeans" - Unimagined community

The state demands Singaporeans to be aware of how problematic, yet extremely important it is for everyone to work for their nation together to avoid racial disharmony and conflicts; to overcome economic and social obstacles of vulnerable society. These ideas are often repeated in my informants talk. Matthew, 28, who works as a teacher, mentioned how young Singaporeans are fed up with thinking and conceptualizing their identity in school projects. In my field notes I have written several times the question "why does there seems to be an identity crisis among Singaporeans?" The state has an extremely strong emphasis on the need to have sense of national belonging and identity, but for the people it seems an impossible or frustrating task to imagine its existence.

When I met new people and told them I was doing a study about Singaporean's sense of belonging, this already aroused some interesting first reactions and comments about the issue. One girl laughed and burst out "there is no sense of belonging!", and one boy's reaction "Wowww… that's difficult topic!" made me realize that from their perspective I was studying something incredibly complicated and impossible topic.

Amaya, a 26-year-old history student, was first silent for a while and said "Sense of belonging… that's something we think about every day". When I met her she wanted to introduce me a Malay area in the city, as she was ethnic Malay herself. She found it important that there is a place where Malays find halal food and headscarves for Muslim women. For her being Malay in Singapore posed even deeper questions of belonging than for most ethnic Chinese.

A Singaporean man in his 40's claimed that

> "…there is no such thing as Singaporean, we're all immigrants you know? You can't study that… people are very confused here about who they are".

He explained how Singapore lacks long common history like Japan[9], how colloquial Singaporean English is not really a language and how the efforts to unite Singaporeans are just state's propaganda. I noticed that the whole conversation made him a bit uncomfortable, especially when I provoked him by stating how there are people who are *non*-Singaporeans, so there must be also Singaporeans. He tried to give me an answer for what defines them but found the question too difficult, confusing or complicated. He was jumping from one argument to another, and in the end he gave up. It was clear that many Singaporeans tried to link the nation to things like common language, history and heritage, which are generally most often associated with a coherent nation-state. However, in Singapore it is difficult to refer to these things in terms of a nation.

The government's efforts to unite people and build a nation are seen as plain propaganda, as surprisingly many said to me. Ashley, 23-year-old Singaporean-Chinese living in UK wrote me about her experience of participating a Singapore Day celebrations in her city:

> "While I appreciate the effort part of me felt that they were... trying too hard... that a sense of belonging is a natural thing that shouldn't be forced. Something about it felt very artificial to me - a lot of the state's efforts feel artificial to us."

Ashley continued that for her it seems that Singaporeans are "shying away from the government's attempts to unite us all".

The artificiality and constructed nature of the Singaporean nation has led some people to the conclusion that there is no such thing as Singaporeans. The idea that national belonging should be a natural feeling implicates that for Singaporeans the nation does not feel natural. The fact that the government is so actively promoting nationalism is making the identification with the nation even more problematic since the official national discourse is in fact limiting the imagination of what Singaporean nation could be and mean. Also noteworthy is the way Ashley is referring to them and us. She makes a clear distinction between the two different levels of the nation: the state and the Singaporeans.

[9] Lee Kuan Yew publicly admired the Japanese society and saw it as an example how Singaporean nation should become (Hudson 2013, 18).

However, sometimes my informants admitted having some innate or unexplained feeling for being Singaporean:

> "It's very interesting what you are doing. I really started to think about these things, like the sense of belonging and Singaporean community. I don't know where it comes from. I just know it is somewhere. It's there. I just know it." – Michelle, 21 (conversation)

Michelle here said aloud the principle of imagined communities: it is there, even though you cannot see or describe it. There is some mutual feeling of belonging even though people would have hard time to explaining it. Andre, 25, was eager to leave Singapore for good and stated how he never misses anything about Singapore when abroad, and assured that nothing will make him feel any attachment to the country. However, later on he started explaining enthusiastically how he always misses the proper *Singaporean* noodles while travelling. Despite being just a random comment about noodles, these kinds of conversations implicate that many informants were very eager to deny their emotional attachment to a country but there seems to be something innate or unconscious attachment to one's national background, whether it is linked to noodles, buildings, family, or other things that they cannot define or describe properly.

What is interesting about the way Singaporeans imagine their community or nation, is that one very easily gets the feeling that they do not have any attachment to Singapore as a nation. In chapter 5.3 I wrote about materiality and modernity as markers of nationhood and how Singaporeans are thought to lack emotional attachment to the nation. The imagined lack of identity and sense of belonging is already partially applied to the understanding of Singaporeanness (Kwok & Ali 1998, 199). It could be said that Singapore is not an imagined community but a community needing to be constantly imagined.

According to Koh (2005, 76) the state is also demanding Singaporeans to be self-reflecting and conscious of their lack of identity by moralizing the issue. Is the state in fact putting the blame on Singaporeans for the "problems" of not having a coherent nation? By emphasizing how important it is to have a sense of belonging and national identity it becomes a self-evident problem for Singaporeans. So in a

sense this blaming complicates the ability to imagine Singaporeanness even more, as the general opinion that Singaporeans as community do not exist suggests.

## 6.2 Nationalized behavior

I have described the discourse of economic progress, pragmatism and authoritarian rule of the nation, and how they actualize in my informants' life. Following that, I have explained how the thought about the lack of national identity has major influence on the understanding of Singaporeanness. Now I will argue that there are some popular ideas about Singaporeanness, which emerge from the social and political realities of life. Besides sharing and understanding the experience of growing up in Singaporean society, there are some national characteristics one is expected to have as a result of that experience. These national characteristics and ideas about Singaporeanness are used in stereotypical manner when people are asked to define or describe Singaporeans.

For a nation to be imagined to exist, there has to be some identifiable, cultural meanings on which the people can reflect themselves and to which they anchor their (national) identity (Hall 1992, 291-3; Velayutham 2007; 42). Despite the imagined lack of Singaporean national identity, people were still able to list national stereotypes and characteristic behavior of individual Singaporeans. I argue, that albeit being funny stereotypes, they are important in shaping the popular idea of Singaporeanness. After all, essentialising and stereotyping are needed in order to imagine a somewhat coherent community (Herzfeld 2005; Hudson 2013; Ong 2005).

In his book about multicultural and nationalist policies in Australia, anthropologist Ghassan Hage (2000, 53) borrows Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital on how within the national territory some groups are seen to be more national and to possess greater national cultural capital. There are plenitude of characteristics and features used for national identification such as skin color or ethnicity, accent, knowledge, practical skills, tastes and certain lifestyle (Hage 1998, 53). This idea can be clearly applied in Singapore and used to exemplify how Singaporeanness can be understood as a distinct national culture. Also Skey (2013) writes how everyday

habits and particular ways of speaking or acting can be defined in a national frame of reference. Also Herzfeld (2005) says that by seeing the national stereotypes in practical way we can understand how they contribute to nation-state ideology (ibid, 28-29).

One of the first things Singaporeans themselves often associated with the word Singaporeanness was the habit of complaining. When I told I am doing an anthropological study about Singaporeans, one girl laughed and said that I should write my thesis about "why we complain so much". Complaining can be anything from mild coffee shop talk to the heated debates online, where Singaporeans can anonymously rant about the problems of society, rather safe from the censorship legislation. My informant Matthew, 28, pointed out that the Singapore's good infrastructure and efficiency have spoiled them and thus making them complain a lot. The complaining about little things or "first world problems" is thought to indicate how Singaporeans do not appreciate enough their comfortable and convenient lives.

Yao (2007, 123) writes about this local habit of "talking cock" (speaking non-sense or idle bantering), which he sees as an everyday form of state formation, when Singaporeans "contemplate the burden and enjoyment of life under Singaporean state" happening mainly in kopitiams and hawker centres. By this talking, or complaining like many say, Singaporeans reflect the effects of state power in their daily life, free from official intrusion of censorship. With this humorous yet serious talk about the state, Singaporeans tell their own Singapore Story as they see it. (Ibid, 136-139.) Researcher Catherine Gomes (2014, 26) calls it a culture of complaint, which is directed towards the government and its policies.

Besides complaining, there were also other characteristics that people used to describe Singaporeans. When asking what it means to be a Singaporean, the most common joke I heard was the *Five C's of Singapore*: car, cash, credit card, condominium and country club membership, which are the things every Singaporean is trying to get in their life. Despite being a joke, it refers to the materialistic, pragmatic and meritocratic nature of the society.

I often asked my informants to describe Singaporeanness. Michelle, 21, said that Singaporeans are "rather selfish and inconsiderate, practical and well-behaved" and because of their comfortable lives people "do not get out of their comfort zones". She also mentioned how "Singaporeans have this 'don't care' mind-set" when they should be helping others or do more than is expected from them. Also Matthew, 28, shared similar thoughts as he described Singaporeans as "not very street smart or worldly, obedient, superficial" and having tendency to be self-centered as they "want to have their cake and eat it". Amin, 24, who was always very critical about Singapore, its politics and people, summarized that

> "…the general Singaporean is materialistic, judgmental, shallow and has an undying love for smartphones and hello kitty".

The explanation for these descriptions could stem from the political and social realities of life in Singapore. The strong meritocratic approach in school and working life has created "a survival of the fittest" kind of atmosphere, which might explain why Singaporeans are usually seen as selfish. It is also quite interesting that most of my informants associated Singaporeanness with quite negative terms and characteristics. Ortmann (2009, 35) has also noted the negativity of the discourse of Singaporeanness, and for example the most popular movies describing Singaporean lifestyle emphasis these negative characteristics.

What makes these characteristics interesting is that there is a specific concept to describe them: *kiasu.* It is a Hokkien[10] word meaning fear of losing. This concept has gained the role of national characteristic in Singapore and could be a topic for an anthropological study on its own. Kiasu attitude has both positive and negative sides, as it may contribute to diligence and hard work in order to be successful in life, but on the other hand leads to selfish and ignorant behavior (Ho et al. 1998).

My informant Rachel, 31, told that the she feels sometimes embarrassed when Singaporeans are "branded as unpleasant tourists who complain about everything". She explained that this behavior is the embodiment of kiasu. Kiasu behavior is also associated to the habit of queuing for cheap things or choosing the food stall with

[10] Hokkien is a most spoken Chinese dialect in Singapore.

the longest queue in hawker centre as it has to be the best stall. In school and work, everybody is striving for their own success no matter what. There is an extensive tuition business even for primary school students to thrive and get the best grades possible. During my stay in Singapore the primary school students had their PSLE's (Primary School Leaving Examination) and I realized that this kiasu attitude has already been imprinted onto Singaporeans age of 12. In the daily newspaper Today (22 November 2014) a sixth-grader Khairul told about his preparation for exams:

> "There were a lot of times when I wanted to give up. Sometimes when I obtained low scores, some of my friends would make fun of me… it would take few days to toughen myself up".

My informant, Rahmat, 31, told how kiasu is a habit that "ticks me off as a Singaporean". For him it means

> "…rushing for things, just to be the first, or be at an advantage against others, no matter how disgraceful it might make you look to others".

As kiasu is usually strongly associated to Confucianism and Chinese traits, it is noteworthy that Singaporean-Malay Rahmat proudly adopts kiasu as part of his national identity. He thus sees kiasu as purely Singaporean trait instead of Chinese one. Kiasu is indeed understood to be something very uniquely Singaporean, even though the origins of it can be traced to Chinese culture. In this sense kiasu could be said to be a "Singaporeanised" concept. Ortmann (2009, 36-7) emphasizes how kiasu is seen not as a politically controlled national trait and can therefore be considered as a popular idea of Singaporeanness in comparison to the official pro-government discourses of Singaporeanness.

Michel Herzfeld's (2005) concept of cultural intimacy focuses on the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered as a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders reassurance of common sociability and familiarity. These aspects also create sense of defiant pride in the face of a more formal or official morality, and sometimes official disapproval as well. Herzfeld calls them self-stereotypes that insiders express ostensibly at their own collective expense. (Ibid, 3.)

There is indeed proudness and also ironic self-mocking behind the identification with kiasuism as it is humorously accepted as part of quirky Singaporean identity (Brown 1998, 43-4) and the rude behavior is somewhat understandable as common sense to survive in competitive society of Singapore (Yao 2007, 148-9). The overall intense competition and meritocracy in Singaporean society partly explains the kiasu behavior and the need to be the first and best in life.

According to social scientist Kenneth Paul Tan (2003, 417), Singaporeans have turned into kiasu workaholics because of the state's strong focus on economics. The economic and global discourses of national identity are embodied in kiasu, and even former PM Goh Chok Tong has stated that construction of pragmatic and ambitious Singaporeanness has created "a less attractive national identity" (Hudson 2013, 30). For Hudson it is not only the individuals who are *kiasu*, it is the whole nation that is driven by this character (ibid, 31). In other words, Singaporeans are conditioned to excel, and this work ethic has turned out to be almost a national duty (Nakashima 2004).

Based on my observation in Singapore, I would say that besides complaining and being kiasu, behaving correctingly and obedience could be analyzed as Singaporean traits too. Former PM Goh Chok Tong saw a littering incident after an outdoor concert as a serious threat to Singapore, as he stated:

> "…our reputation as one of the world's cleanest cities is going down the rubbish chute… Cleanliness is a character thing. It shows who you really are" (Mitton 2015).

Littering and jaywalking are the most common offences people commit in Singapore. The fact that Singapore has such strict penal code and the possibility to get fined for some minor offences has generated astonishingly well-behaving population. In addition, PM Goh's comment about cleanliness as a character implicates how Singaporeans are expected to know how to conduct.

STOMP (Strait Times Online Mobile Print) is a news website where people can post their own stories and pictures online. It is a common joke that if you do something considered socially inappropriate in a MRT, such as not giving up your seat for older

people, you can get “Stomped”. This means that someone will post a photo of you online to humiliate your bad behavior. The funny thing is that people are always claiming and ensuring that those who behave in unacceptable way in public are not Singaporeans. Once I was talking loudly on a phone for the whole bus ride and realized how it was probably rude and inconsiderate towards other passenger, as usually the atmosphere in public transportation is very discreet. I mentioned this to my local friend, and he just said that no one cares since I am foreigner. I am not expected to behave accordingly anyway.

The importance of correct behavior is well noted on government-level, as throughout the 50-year-history there has been a plethora of campaigns to advice people for proper conduct. I have never seen such extensive efforts to guide people to behave, think and act in certain way as in Singapore. The campaigns have reminded people to keep Singapore clean and not to litter or spit, encouraged to have healthy lifestyle, wash hands properly, raise productivity in workplace and be a good neighbor (Lim & Kah 2013).

One campaign that caught my eye immediately after moving to Singapore was “Graciousness in public transport”. On MRT’s and buses there were big posters of Hushush-Hannah, Stand-up-Stacey, Move-in-Martin, Give-away-Glenda and Bag-Down-Benny who advised people to give up their seats for old, put your bag down to give space, and to be considerate while talking with someone. This excessive guidance for how to be polite and good citizen was very overwhelming for me. My Singaporean friends took these campaigns mainly as jokes, even though one friend mentioned that when entering the MRT “people learned to stand aside only after years of education”. Some say that Singapore has been remarkably successful in this "war" against disagreeable behavior (Gomes 2001).

In summary, I argue, that this behavior, whether complaining, kiasu or proper conduct, are part of the cultural capital one is supposed to have in order to be regarded as true Singaporean. These characters give a cultural meaning for a Singaporean nation as they are used to conceptualize and concretize

Singaporeanness. Nationalism is about displaying cultural self-consciousness (Kapferer 1989), and in Singapore this seems to be one way to do it.

## 6.3 Negotiations of national being

I have demonstrated how behavior and characteristics may form a basis for national culture that binds people together as a nation. This culture is also connected to the dominant national discourses and demands of being Singaporean. This means that Singaporeanness is negotiated in the space between these two spheres of national identification where the different conceptualization of the nation meet. Gupta & Ferguson (2001) write how local identities often conform to national categories. In Singapore people link specific personal behavior to national framework and thus conceptualize their otherwise complicated national identification.

Anthropologist Konstantinos Kalantzis (2014) has studied the production of difference in Crete by analyzing the conditioned character of Sphakian nativism, which is dependent on dominant discourses in Greek-Cretan context. He focuses on what kind of subjectifications the embodiment of a stereotypical form enables, and concludes that given national traditions are critically evaluated among the Sphakians, who have their own terms and criteria to define their stereotyping traditions. By examining these negotiations over cultural dominance and definitions we can better understand the process of national subjectification.

Sociologist Craig Calhoun says that it is important to recognize the public discourse of nation, because it is a source of social solidarity, mutual commitment and shared interest (2002, 97). In Singapore the state tries to bind the people together with the idea of vulnerability and economic imperative, but in the everyday level the solidarity may come from somewhere else. On the other hand, by participating in production of the dominant discourse people also experience solidarity and belonging to a nation (cf. Herzfeld 2005, 2). For example, the acknowledgement of authoritanism in Singaporean life, adopting the idea of lack of identity and turning pragmatic discourse to kiasu behavior express the negotiation of nationalism between the state and the people.

In her ethnographic classroom research Li-Ching Ho (2010) summarizes that the Singaporean students provided similar accounts of Singaporeanness and historical narratives. She claims that the inclusive nature of the national discourses, which emphasizes unity, consensus, and harmony partly produces this shared understanding. Ho points out that the students seemed to avoid addressing controversial issues, and they did not contest the ideas of racial harmony, meritocracy, and need for progress. (Ibid.) Also historian Liew Kai Khiun commented on Living with Myths seminar on 21st of November 2014 that Singaporeans tend to fit their experiences to the dominant discourses, and they are not questioning or coming up with any alternatives easily. Liew claims that Singaporeans are fitting themselves and their life experiences to the official *Singapore Story* so that e.g. older Singaporeans are not capable of retrieving memories that wouldn't fit into the Story. (Liew 2014).

The same logic applies to the different ways to conceptualize Singaporeanness. The understandings are always negotiated in the in-between space of the state and the people, in the interplay of discourses. Calhoun (2007, 40-1) claims:

> "…it is a sociological misunderstanding to think that the reality of nations depends on the accuracy of their collective self-representations."

In other words, the idea that nations are not real because of their artificial construction should be criticized. If the ideas are repeated in discursive way, they already became partially real. It is another question if they are contradictory or problematic, but that does not make them less real. It is important to bear in mind that the different ways to conceptualize a nation go hand in hand, in negotiation with each other. They are interwoven. People do not absorb dominant discourse in a vacuum but they are fitted into their existing ideas and realities of the nation.

The core issue here is the nationalist ideology, which is strongly linked to the government's vision of ideal Singaporean nation rather than to popular nationalist sentiments. There are constant negotiations between cultural meanings of Singaporeanness and the political efforts to maintain an effective nation-state. (Hudson 2013, 11.) This configuration of Singaporeanness is a combination of authoritarianism, economic imperative and pragmatism, which is used to argument

the unity of the nation. From the perspective of nation building, the discourse about vulnerable nation may serve the purpose of the state's hold over its people. Yet for the people it causes an unnecessary national identity crisis.

I have argued that despite the idea of lacking national identity, Singaporeans are able to define themselves and imagine as community through essentialising and stereotyping of Singaporeanness. In the next chapter I continue considering the interplay of dominant discourses and everyday understandings of Singaporeanness. Instead of imagination of cultural coherence, I turn the focus on the internal diversity of Singaporeanness, and how that is confronted in terms of being a nation.

# 7 Mediated everyday nationalism

I have argued that the state promotes an idea of vulnerable and weak Singaporeanness because in terms of national ideology a diverse nation seems impossible to control. Thus the responsibility to strengthen and solidify the sense of national belonging is put on the people. This discourse legitimates the government's excessive efforts to promote and instill nationalism. Especially young Singaporeans are presented as deviants with moral and cultural dilemma what comes to their national identification, and therefore they need parental discipline (Koh 2007, 192). The youth threatens the future of the nation and because they do not see a connection between the nation and identity (Tarulevicz 2010, 33) and are thus imagined to lack the national identity.

Social scientist Ravinder Sidhu (2003, 190) reminds that even though the official national discourse is obsessed with fixed national identity, the Singaporean subjectivity should be observed as dynamic and flexible, especially what comes to the younger generation. In this chapter I examine how my informants respond to the demands of being Singaporean in its fixed sense.

First I will examine the multicultural discourse and the negotiations of Singaporeanness in face of diversity. Hybridity is a common concept used in the previous studies about Singaporeanness as it thought to describe well the nature of it. However, it is problematic as it assumes that there is some pure or authentic form of identity which is then mixed, and that is exactly how the state also argues about the lack of national identity. I want to postulate that this is not necessarily the way Singaporeanness should be understood.

Instead, I will apply the concept of mediation to explain the construction of Singaporeanness. Anthropologist William Mazzarella (2004, 357) says that mediation happens when people are both self-distancing and self-recognizing themselves. This determination and indeterminacy structures the mediation process (ibid, 359). The negotiations of Singaporeanness I have already described are based on experience of coherence between the Singaporeans. Now I will focus

on issues that the government sees as a hindrance to the unity of a nation. I will argue that those issues are in fact an essential part of Singaporeanness in its popular sense, when the young people mediate them in their daily lives.

To finish my analysis I will discuss the questions of local & global, and nationalism & cosmopolitanism, when put together will sum up my arguments about Singaporeanness. I have already discussed how Singapore's interest lies in building an economically efficient nation. Singapore illustrates the current global challenges the nation-states face, as economic globalization and transnational migration weaken the sense of a place and nation that have traditionally defined belonging (Kluver & Weber 2003). Singapore's focus on economic growth and global orientation has undervalued the importance of national identification and locality.

I argue that this "challenge" is in fact the fundamental aspect of understanding Singaporeanness from the perspective of younger generation. Gupta & Ferguson (2001) criticize the common linking of locality, identity, culture and place and suggest instead that we should examine the process where a space is constructed and imagined as a concrete locality (ibid, 36). Thus I will argue that Singapore's global orientation is centrally involved in the production of "local" Singaporeanness. This further contests the idea of spatially fixed national identities.

## 7.1 Essential diversity

As was explained in chapter 4.2, the idea of unity in diversity is deeply embedded in national discourse. My informants often agreed that their respective ethnic categories matter in their institutionalized sense, but not when it comes to friendships or their social circles. Instead of making boundaries between Singaporeans, ethnic categories are in fact connecting Singaporeans in an interesting way. Also when I discussed with my informants about the meaning of ethnicity and race for in Singaporeanness, I noticed an interesting controversy: they were at the same time able to imagine and deny the existence of Singaporeanness in terms of its diversity.

The official unity in diversity idea was very present in my informants' speech as they saw ethnicity as a source of cultural diversity and as something that shapes, unites, and makes up the Singaporean national identity.

> "I feel like it's hard to make a distinction. They [ethnic groups] are all profoundly connected in ways that I find difficulty in expressing even to myself. Maybe I'm too "hippie" or just blissfully ignorant to understand or have any desire to understand these borders. I'm not sure! But I do believe all of these "borders" in some ways help shape us into who we are as inhabitants of this land." - Amanda, 24

Singaporeanness is understood to be essentially diverse, which then shapes the understanding of nationality itself. This idea came up in various conversations I had with my informants. Michelle, 21, highlighted that "What you have to understand is that we are all Singaporeans!" She told me about the racial harmony day celebrated in schools, and how Singaporeans live peacefully side-by-side, even though "[Singaporean-]Malays are a bit different, but that's okay".

Some wanted to remind me how Singapore is a complex society and how the ethnic groups are not as homogenous as assumed. Singaporean-Chinese people, for instance, consist of various dialect groups. Rahmat, 31, told me that it is clear that most Singaporeans have very mixed backgrounds and no one is genetically pure Malay or Chinese. He told that when someone starts to explain his family history to him, he can just say, "I got it bro, no need to explain".

However, having mixed background can also cause "an identity crisis", as has happened to my informant Andre, 25, whose mother is Singaporean-Indian and father Singaporean-Chinese. This makes Andre a so-called Chindian-Singaporean. He told an example how once in school he wrote down his ethnicity as Chinese and the teacher objected that it is not true since he did not look like Chinese. Andre was extremely frustrated for the fact that he has to identity with an ethnic category.

Also people falling under the category of "others" might need to constantly prove their Singaporeanness to other fellow Singaporeans. My Singaporean-Australian contact told how she encounters discrimination because of her Eurasian roots. Singaporean girls named Julia D'Silva (2014) and Patricia Tobin (2015) have written

lengthy Facebook-posts about their frustration over explaining their respective European names despite looking and being partly Chinese-Singaporeans.

Singaporean-Indian Elaine, 31, instead told how she does not feel like belonging to Singapore anymore since everybody around is Chinese. Most of her relatives have emigrated from Singapore as they feel there is no space for them anymore as ethnic Indians. This experience indicates how Singaporeanness has not gained supra-ethnic nature for everybody. This is more often the feeling of minority groups, as Singapore is seen foremost as a Chinese society.

As mentioned, the immigration pattern strengthens the existing ethnic division. There are plenty of Mainland Chinese but also Indian nationals and Malays from Indonesia and Malaysia living in Singapore. When meeting new people or just walking on the street, for me it was impossible to say who is a Singaporean and who is not, since you cannot make any assumption by the looks. However, some of my informants claimed that they do recognize the non-Singaporeans from their outward appearance. Usually this does not have anything to do with ethnic looks.

It is also worth of noting that this common ethnic background does not really unite local and foreign people in Singapore. For example, Singaporean-Chinese and Mainland Chinese, or Singaporean-Malay and Malaysian Malay may feel socially very distant from each other, even though they share the same ethnic and cultural background and traditions (Liu 2014). When Singaporeanness is seen against these other nationalities, cultures, and their way of life, it inherits a deeper meaning. This is also connected to the experience of growing up in Singapore. The shared territorial and national experiences of daily life unite Singaporeans more than common ethnic background with others. This reveals the faults of general nationalist ideology, which assumes that people should share certain ancient culture or traditions to feel belonging to each other. Nationalism can be based on various commonalities, and above all, on common daily life experiences.

There have been also interesting incidents, like the “curry-gate” few years ago when Chinese PR’s complained about their neighboring Singaporean-Indian family

cooking curry and the smell spreading in the building. After mediation the Singaporean family agreed to cook curry only on days their Chinese neighbors were not at home. This led to a launch of a campaign "Cook and share a pot of curry" to promote the racial harmony and to criticize the foreigners inability to adapt to Singaporean society. (Gomes 2014, 31.) Many of my informants mentioned this to me also as an example of multiculturalism in Singapore. Rachel, 31, stated that respecting the Singaporean way of life

> "…would mean no complaining or throwing a hissy fit if your neighbour is cooking some awesome curry".

Essential part of being Singaporean is indeed to understand and cherish the Singaporean kind of multiculturalism. However, even though Singaporeanness is a mixture of different ethnic cultures and difficult to define without those, the national imagination also limits multiculturalism to Chinese, Indian and Malay ethnic traditions and influences. As an immigrant society, being Singaporean means being originally from somewhere else, but from the given cultural backgrounds.

Another thing to remember is the physical location of Singaporean society. As another post-colonial state, Singapore is easily associated with other South-East Asian developing countries. However, living in a thriving and shining prosperous city-state makes Singaporeans socio-economically very different from their neighbors. As Rahmat, 31, said, "Malaysians think we are pampered rich kids"[11]. This might also affect to the fact that materiality and infrastructure are valued so much by Singaporeans since this distinguishes Singapore from her neighbors significantly.

Usually the awareness of nationality grows when abroad, and this is particularly true for Singaporeans; being Singaporean may sometimes lack meaning inside Singapore, but outside it becomes meaningful. Abroad one can refer to him/herself just as Singaporean, without underlining certain ethnicity. As explained in chapter 4.2, institutionalized ethnic categories demand Singaporeans to identify with given racial groups. Chua (2003, 60) argues that by claiming a Singaporean identity

[11] David Henley (1995, 288) points out, that also in Indonesia culture and ethnicity have limited relevance for nationalism: Malays in different countries may be identical in cultural terms, but there have separate national identities.

without racial definitions is to take a political position against the state, because the state insists the people to stick with their ethnic identities besides the national one. Especially the younger generation is denying ethnicity as marker of their identity, which also makes it seem that they would lack national identity (Koh 2005, 77). The young could see themselves as so-called "ethnic Singaporeans" in their own terms and resist the dominant discourse. This is another reason for the state to target youth with their various efforts to instill the national identity.

The idea of unity in diversity is deeply embedded in understanding of Singaporeanness, and it is essential to understand and cherish this diversity. However, the diversity also creates a space where a Singaporean, supra ethnic, national culture may emerge in its own way. The problem is that the state does not recognize this popular idea of being Singaporean without ethnic affixes. By disregarding the possibility of supra ethnic identities, the state is also hindering the development of uniquely Singaporean national culture and identity. Herzfeld (2005, 5) writes how sometimes the state denies popular practices which might disrupt state's principles, but which would also be vital for the state's continuation. Also Mazzarella (2004, 357) describes how nation can become dependent mediations and contingencies that it ultimately denies. In Singapore this would mean, that the state should recognize the grass-root national sentiments and embrace them in order to strengthen the future generation's sense of national belonging,

## 7.2 Speaking and eating the nation

I had a conversation about Singaporean multiracialism with my friend, and he was joking how "we Singaporeans just like our things *rojak*[12]". I saw an interesting metaphor and pun behind this sentence, as it can refer literally to two important multicultural features in Singapore, language and food, through which Singaporean cultural identity and collective solidarity are sometimes expressed (Gomes 2014, 31). Some say that those are two of the small things that unite diverse Singaporeans and also good examples of mediated features of Singaporean culture. They also make imagining Singaporeanness easier and thus contribute in construction of national culture.

[12] *Rojak* means mixed in Malay language.

First I will discuss about the widely spoken colloquial language, Singlish, which is a mixture of English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil words, expressions and grammar. Sentence "we like our things *rojak*" would be just one example of the way to use Singlish. Often people mentioned how Singlish is the only thing uniting Singaporeans. The capability to understand certain words and expressions, and mastering the local English accent reveal a Singaporean amongst foreigners, whether in Singapore or abroad. Hearing someone speaking in Singlish accent "you feel like home".

Both old and young Singaporeans use Singlish in daily basis. It is not a youth slang as some might assume, but more like a creole language developed when the Chinese, Malay and Indian people were interacting with each other in *kampong*s where people lived side by side in squatter houses. Often this kind of patois is used by lower classes or less educated people of society, but this is not the case with Singlish. It is used at every level of society for communication between Singaporeans despite the fact that a person would master perfect Standard English with British accent.

There are various ways to use Singlish from specific food and drink terminology to simple non-English particles (lah, leh, lor etc.) at the end of a clause. There are also several words to refer to certain kind of people: uncle and auntie for older persons and Chinese words like *ang moh* for Caucasian and *ah beng/lian* for stereotypic uneducated person. Besides recognizable accent, the lexical order also marks Singlish as broken or simplified English.

I have explained the importance of economic success of the nation for the Singaporean government. Following this logic, the government has discouraged the use of Singlish, as it would "reduce Singaporeans employability in global economy" (Sidhu 2003, 189). In this sense, common language as basis for national identification is denied at the expense of Singapore's economic and global stance in the world. The government has had "Speak Good English Movement", as the local colloquial English is seen to threaten Singaporeans ability to speak proper English. On the other hand, there has also been "Speak Mandarin" –campaign to unify the Chinese dialect groups, and to foster the strong diplomatic and economic relations

with China. These contradictory expectations for cultural and national identification are yet another example of how such a twisted logic exists behind Singaporean nationalism.

For me Singlish appeared as a distinct language since my informants actively switched between Singlish and Standard English when they spoke to me. Before going to the field I even tried to learn some Singlish words and expression thinking it would be necessary for me to know them, but it was not. The language is for Singaporeans and I was not expected to know it. Most of the informants did not even use any specific Singlish expressions with me, if there were no other Singaporeans around. Usually the language got through only in expressions of surprise or frustration. An interesting case was my close Singaporean contact, who often lamented how Singaporeans speak bad English, but she was constantly using Singlish expression in her daily speech. It might be that the usage was conscious and she does that in an ironic way, but for me that appears again as an interesting negotiation and mediation of one's national identification.

On the other hand, local linguist Debbie Ho (2006) has criticized the interpretation of Singlish to be a uniting force or part of Singaporean culture. Instead she suggests that Singlish is representing people's rejection of both Western and Eastern cultures. She examines what kind of cultural identity Singaporeans express through language, and comes into the conclusion that the language issues reflect young Singaporeans experience of identity flux of not knowing who they are, and to what beliefs and values should attach to themselves in order to belong to a community. This creates uncertainty about their cultural identity and the understanding of a nation. Ho argues that young Singaporeans are reluctant to identify with the West, but they feel also removed from their Eastern Asian roots (Ibid, 18-21.)

I will analyze this "identity flux" in more detail in next sub-chapter, but here I just conclude that I find Ho's analysis rather interesting in a sense that most of my informants did mention Singlish to be the main marker of their national identity. Could it be that since the language is the only one of the "classic" markers of nationality for Singaporeans, Singlish might be thought to bind people together as a

nation? I would say that Ho's interpretation is another example how national identities are often thought to be fixed and clearly defined entities.

There is also wide food and beverage terminology in Singlish. Once in a local cafe in a shopping mall, a supposedly American tourist girl was trying to order a cup of black coffee from a Singaporean auntie behind the counter. However, the girl kept getting coffee with milk and sugar and was getting really frustrated. And so was the auntie, as she did not understand why the girl was complaining for having milk and sugar in her coffee. According to Singlish food and drink terminology, ordering "one coffee", or *kopi* to be more precise, gives you sweetened coffee with condensed milk. Obviously the girl was not aware of the Singaporean coffee terminology.

Above-mentioned word *rojak* (mixed) is also a traditional salad dish mixing different fruits and vegetables. Like the language and the people themselves, the local food is also a mixture of Malay, Indian and Chinese cuisines. Singaporean food is a source of proudness in the same way as their language, being something uniquely Singaporean. Besides its significance in a daily basis (e.g. the common question "have you had your lunch/dinner yet" as "how are you"), Singapore is known for being the mecca for foodies. Many Singaporeans told me how food is one of *the only* things they miss while being abroad. One cannot find proper noodles elsewhere. Singaporean-Indian Elaine, 30, has been living in Finland for several years and told me she would do anything to have restaurant selling chicken rice here and is always craving for proper curry. After long explanation about politics in Singapore, also UK-based Ashley finished her email with

> "… and remember to try all of the local food. My personal favourite is BBQ Stingray - the softest, most tender fish I have ever tasted".

Food is part of the cultural heritage and the masterpiece of multiculturalism in Singapore. Like language, cuisine is one of the few things where the mix of cultures and differences are more of an asset than challenge, taking the best from everyone and forming a new totality, something Singaporean. I am suggesting that Singlish and Singaporean cuisine being *rojak* can be seen as a metaphor for understanding the nature of Singaporeanness in wider level. The essence of Singaporeanness is the mixture and the variety of what it consists of. According to Singapore's constitution,

the city-state is multiracial, multilingual, multi-religious and multicultural, which guarantees that all groups are equal in front of citizenship, services and infrastructure and that everyone has the same rights and responsibilities (Ackermann 1997, 456). Being *rojak* is thus the predominant and essential feature of Singaporeanness not only in official level, but also in daily life.

Ghassan Hage's (1998) interpretation of national cultural capital is again relevant concept here, as certain social conduct, lifestyle and habits are used to define who is a Singaporean. I have already talked about how the experience of growing up in Singaporean authoritarian and materialist society and adjusting to its *kiasu* atmosphere is important for Singaporeanness. I am now adding the acknowledgment of Singaporean multiculturalism, ability to speak Singlish and respect for their food to the list.

After all this the state still sees national identification problematic for Singaporeans. The obsession with imagining coherent nation denies this kind of "mixed" reality of national identification as it draws strict boundaries for national identity. There is no in-between form of identification (Koh 2005, 77). However, in immigrant societies like Singapore there are no cultural practices that would not be a mixture of various ways to speak, eat and live. We should look at these instances of Singaporeanness as mediated features that are an outcome of identity negotiations, where Singaporeans construct the idea of their national being.

## 7.3 Cosmopolitan nation

Calhoun (2008, 428) has defined cosmopolitanism as "being at home with diversity", and in the case of Singapore this definition could be applied literally. Academic discussion about cosmopolitanism is vast and I do not intend to go into that here. The concept has rather loose meaning and vague definitions nowadays. However, it is relevant to take notice of the usage of it in Singaporean context, as Singapore is officially promoted as global and modern city-state whose citizens should be cosmopolitan, international and open-minded for diversity.

In brief, the discussion about cosmopolitanism I follow in the case of Singapore is the questions of locality and globality. Anthropologist and well-known globalization theorist Arjun Appadurai wrote in 1990[13] that when global cultural flows come into contact with nationalist forms of culture, the hegemony of nation-states gets challenged. However, the recent global history has shown that this has not been the case, and nations still matter. Gupta & Ferguson (1997) have suggested, that we should concentrate on understanding how locality and community are formed and lived nowadays in midst of global influences, and forget the idea that local would be something more original and authentic, opposed to global (ibid, 6-7). They also note that as states use simplistic ideas of national identity and locality, anthropology can highlight the nuances of daily life that challenge these official ideas and discourses (ibid, 14.)

When talking about public housing I already brought up the issues of global and local national identification. I continue now to analyze how the global-local –dichotomy is present in wider debate about globalization and cosmopolitanism in Singaporean context. However, my perspective is still on nationalism and how the nation gets understood in these debates. I concentrate on how Singaporeans imagine their place between the essentialised global and local identifications, and how can everyday nationalism be involved in these negotiations.

Cosmopolitanism does not go well together with classic nationalist ideology, which emphasizes the strong rootedness and belonging to a single nation. Singapore has tried to combine these two approaches resulting in controversial idea of national identity being both cosmopolitan and patriotic at the same time. Hudson (2013, 40-1) argues, that since the global space in Singapore offers these different forms of cosmopolitan belonging, the idea of a nation is constantly challenged. The dilemma of Singaporeanness is how to be local and global at the same time, to fulfill the demands expressed in official national discourses.

[13] See **Arjun Appadurai** 1990. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.

According to Sidhu (2003), the Singaporean government privileges the economic dimension of globalization over the cultural one. This means that the state wants to emphasize Singapore's role on global economy, but resists global cultural influences which are assumed to diminish locality and Singaporeanness. Singaporeans have to have a spatially fixed national identity that is based on modernist assumptions of national identities. (Ibid, 169.) Aihwa Ong (2005, 14) argues that from an anthropological perspective, cultural globalization is a dialectic process where common dichotomies like global and local are sides of the same coin, not opposites. This insight is extremely relevant in Singapore.

The dichotomy between global and local has inspired many studies in Singapore, and cosmopolitanism is a popular concept used both among academia and in politics of nation building. The former PM Goh Chok Tong himself made a distinction between heartlanders and cosmopolitans in a National Day rally speech in 1999, and these two groups have been the focus of several studies of Singaporean transnmigrants (see e.g. Elaine Ho, Brenda Yeoh, Lily Kong).

I want to go beyond this dichotomy and ask if young people's experience of Singaporeanness would be something between them, a mediated understanding. Could the "cosmopolitan" way of life in fact be a Singaporean way of life? Is there a national aspiration in cosmopolitan or global lifestyle? Bhabha (1990, 3) suggests that when "reading" the nation we should pay more attention to the spheres of national culture from which alternative perceptions might emerge. Could the young generation of Singaporeans with their cosmopolitan worldview be this alternative voice?

I have explained that the government is concerned about the Westernization of young Singaporeans minds and lives. For the state it seems that particularly younger generation is lacking the national identity since they are more inclined towards Western values and lifestyle: the young people want an identity "not of their own" (Koh 2005, 77). The competing local (Eastern Asian) and global (Western) sources of interests result in a new configuration of identities (ibid, 68). I argue that as young

people mediate these influences, they are able to conceptualize another kind of Singaporenness.

The dialogue between global and local actualizes in young Singaporeans lives. A friend of mine, a foreigner in Singapore himself, stated that in his opinion Singaporeans are "going to Starbucks and trying to be western 'cause they don't want to be seen as Asian". This goes well with the earlier claim of Debbie Ho (chapter 7.2), that Singlish would indicate people's anxiety over Eastern and Western cultural influences. It also implicates how in everyday thinking people are eager to associate certain practices to be either local or global.

As I started the fieldwork, I was also fascinated by the mixture of Asian and Western influence Singapore has, both in Singaporean's lifestyles, and in the physical landscape and infrastructure: the ultra-modern skyscrapers and futuristic architecture next to the old colonial shop houses, hawker centers and *local* HDB buildings. It was easy for me to adjust to the daily life there, as it was not *too Asian*. I felt certain social sameness or closeness to the young Singaporeans I met. At the same time there was something exotic in Singapore, as the *Asianness* was also present.

I admit that I was committing the cardinal mistake of anthropology: essentialising and misinterpreting the idea of local and global, Eastern and Western. I often asked my informants to take me into local neighborhoods meaning that I did not want to see the touristy sights but something *more Singaporean*. This also gave me an interesting insight on how my informants understood the meaning of local and Singaporean. I did find myself from HDB areas, *kopitiams* and hawker centers, but also very often from downtown hipster coffee bars, which I would put in the category of global or Western. One girl took me to an old coffeehouse in Chinatown to taste traditional pastries. She was surprised when I ordered the *kopi*, the local coffee served in every *kopitiam*, as she had not had *kopi* in ages. She preferred café latte, and probably assumed that I would too. I started to wonder what the reasoning behind these assumptions is, both the girl's and mine? Why is ordering *kopi* thought to be more Singaporean than ordering Caramel Frappe from Starbucks?

The point I want to make it that the essentialising local-global-dichotomy serves as an interesting basis for the analysis of Singaporeanness in many levels. What comes to the physical space, it is important to remember how Singapore is an intimate city-space, where these questions might get very concrete meanings. I spend quite a lot of time in an area called Bugis near downtown Singapore. Besides busy road there are modern shopping malls but also smaller streets hawker stalls and street vendors. There is also popular Arab Street where trendy bars and cafes stand next to an old Malay heritage area with the oldest mosque in Singapore.

Next to Bugis is Rochor Centre, a colorful HDB estate. I went there one Saturday and walked around amongst busy market stalls and Chinese astrology stands. People were running from a Chinese temple to a Hindu temple next-door "to maximize the luck" as my friend explained. Passing by a void deck of an HDB block I noticed a canopy under which there were some people sitting around the tables and eating. Behind them, also under the canopy, there was an altar and a coffin. I realized I was witnessing traditional Chinese funeral wake held on the void deck of a resident building, next to a busy shopping street. Around the corner you can see the skyscrapers shining in the sun and the famous skyline of Marina Bay.

This is how intimate the city-state of Singapore can get. One moment you are in the heartland of Singapore, seeing people do their daily stuff in their neighborhood, and next you are having the most expensive drink on a rooftop bar in your cocktail dress. These kinds of experiences are often interpreted as Singapore being between east and west, between local way of life and global, cosmopolitan aspirations. What if these places, situations and experiences could be seen just a way of Singaporean life? What if being Singaporean is constructed and negotiated in these spatial and temporal situations where the essential characters of Singapore meet? Do people really have the need to separate these experiences of being more Singaporean or less Singaporean way of doing things?

Beng-Huat Chua (2000) has written a rather interesting analysis of young Singaporeans approach to modernity and Westernization of Singaporean society. He describes how McDonalds, found on every corner of the city and HDB areas,

functions as a popular hangout place for young Singaporeans. Chua argues, that residential conditions (living with parents in HDB) and increased affluence drives youth to spend time in downtown areas. Often the spread of multinational or American chain restaurants is seen as a sign of "Westernization", but Chua argues that in Singaporean context they have gotten highly localized meanings as young people have adopted them as their free time spaces. Chua interprets this as familiarization, or as I would say Singaporeanisation, of an American space in the city. I see this also as a good example of how reputed local and global spaces might in fact be mediated in a sense. Globalization and localization are one process and part of each other: the local is the spin-off of the global (Ong 2005, 14)

On the other hand, sometimes yet abstract but still so real local-global –dichotomy turns out to be quite bizarre. Already in early November the famous shopping street Orchard Road started to fill up of extravagant and ostentatious Christmas decorations. I saw more reindeers, Santa Clauses, snowflakes, Christmas trees and garlands than ever back at home in Finland or anywhere else where people actually celebrate this kind of Christmas. It did not make sense to me. Why did they have all these symbols of Nordic winter and Christmas under the palm trees in +30 degrees? Sidhu (2003) argues that Christmas on Orchard Road is a good time and place to analyze Singapore's contradictions, as these "arctic heterotopias" are "a symbol and reminder of the importance of Northern Hemisphere" to Singapore (ibid, 170).

Even though the state sees Westernisation threatening young Singaporeans national identification, the vision of global and modern city demands the upholding of the Western presence in Singapore. Singaporeans then have to figure out their position in these spaces, which are imagined to be contradictory, even though it would not necessarily have to be so. The static idea of what Singaporeanness might be clashes with young people's everyday life. Chang (2012, 703) asks, if these kind of "collective transnational activities and cosmopolitan spirit" could in fact reflect national character and identity of Singaporeans. He also emphasizes how cosmopolitan identity reflects the dissonance between old and young generation of Singaporeans, as they may have very different aspirations and interest in their national lives (ibid, 693). Chang argues that the state has not been able to respond to the globalization

so that it would make sense in terms of nation building. Singaporeans might conceive an identity beyond the nation-state, but the nationalist discourse does not give a reason to do that, since it denies the possibility of mediated construction of identity (ibid).

In summary, cosmopolitanism is rather misused concept in Singapore. What is in fact civic nationalism is interpreted as cosmopolitanism. I have argued that the so-called cosmopolitan way of life could be a Singaporean way of life, if the nationalist discourse gave space to this kind of national identification. It is identifiable that both the popularity and theoretical definitions of nationalism and cosmopolitanism are limited in their usefulness in the context of Singapore. The fact that nationalism and cosmopolitanism, are often seen as each other's opposites has led me to the conclusion that Singaporeans could be seen somewhere in between of these two. The cosmopolitan elements of this civic nationalism may become part of understanding the nation, as the interesting complex situation in Singapore shows.

# 8 Conclusion

> "Sovereign states are invented, but people living under their rule and efficiency are real with their real life experiences" (Tayei Selasi 2014)

In this thesis I have explored the significance of national identification and national thinking in a multicultural setting. Inspired by anthropological theories of nationalism I have demonstrated how the Singaporean nation-state is imagined to exist. I have moved between the normative, state-driven and popular national discourses to analyze how my informants understand the nation in Singapore, and how they conceptualize and experience Singaporeanness. By observing the everyday practices that represent dominant discourses my aim has been to better understand how people experience and understand a nation.

In the beginning I stated two research questions. The first question was "What kind of daily experiences and ideas unite people, creating affinity and mutual feeling of being one nation?" To answer this I have presented three different instances of Singaporeanness:

i) The shared experience of growing up and living in Singapore's specific socio-political reality creates a sense of national belonging that is also affected by that reality.

ii) The imagination of the nation as culturally coherent but at the same time essentially diverse is a result of complex negotiations of national identification between the state and the people.

iii) The global Singaporeanness is also a localized identity but this aspect of young Singaporeans' lives is not recognized in state-level.

The second question was "How are these experiences and ideas related to the state's efforts and discursive practices to build a nation?" My aim has been to explain that the Singaporeanness is imagined and constructed in the negotiations of the state's efforts and people's ideas. The above instances of Singaporeanness are thus closely related to the state's efforts to build a nation.

The dominant discourses suggest that Singaporeans should work hard for the national unity since it is imagined to be always under threat. This creates a constant

feeling of not being a plausible nation, and subsequently the inability to have a national identity. Discourses are also used to legitimate the authoritarian rule, which creates nationalized life experiences. Due to the same discourse of vulnerability, the society is driven by pragmatic values and economic motives. This is reflected in people's "Singaporean" behavior, which is recognized as part of common Singaporean culture. At the same time the managing of diversity and ideal national identity gets different meanings in everyday level of life, and these mediated meanings eventually from the foundation of global but local Singaporeanness.

As Velayutham (2007) summarizes, the state defines Singaporeans national identification as incomplete process and even hinders it by misrecognizing the grass-root national sentiments of the people. Young Singaporeans are especially in cultural limbo, where they do not associate themselves clearly either to be Eastern Asian or Western. In addition, the state has provided its people with all modern comforts and high standards of living, but Singaporeans are reproached not to have affective ties to the nation. (Ibid, 35.)

My main argument has been that the Singaporeanness my informants express and experience differs from the ideal national identity and belonging that the government wants to promote. Young people have their own personal way to be Singaporean, which makes their sense of national belonging significant for them. At the same time the official national discourse feels empty and forced. Singaporeanness is negotiated in the space between official demands and people's own definitions of what Singaporeanness is.

Homi Bhabha (1990) claims that nation is an ambivalent way to understand cultural representations. However, to be able to imagine a community to exist, there has to be identifiable meanings attached to it (Hall 1992). I have examined what kinds of things provide feelings of solidarity, familiarity and belonging for Singaporeans, while they simultaneously imagine that Singaporeanness does not exist. I have demonstrated that the Singaporeans are able to define and identify themselves by several ways: mastering Singlish, understanding the Singaporean diversity,

behaving in certain expected way, respecting the materiality, and sharing the experience of the socio-political realities of living in Singapore. These are some of the identifiable meanings, common experiences and imagined features of Singaporean nation. When people actively reproduce these ideas of community in their talk and actions, the nation can exist.

All in all, the imagined Singaporeanness is produced in negotiations between the state and the people. The various ways to conceptualize the nation are evolving together in the same space. I have demonstrated how the state uses several different discourses to build, control, and produce an ideal nation for itself. In the state's terms, Singapore might appear as disunited and diverse but in popular terms, being Singaporeans might make sense in the everyday life. For example, the state and the people understand the idea of cosmopolitan Singaporeans quite differently. I have argued that while the state sees cosmopolitanism as a necessary quality of people, for the young people it is part of everyday Singaporeanness creating unnecessary dilemma for their national identification.

Singaporeans do have some sort of nationalist feelings, whether as Singapore being their home or as a place that has given them good living conditions. Is Singapore really then a post-colonial nation-state that needs to imagine its existence as Anderson has proposed, and how the government obviously also sees it? As a multiethnic and cosmopolitan city-state, Singapore differs fundamentally from many other post-colonial countries that have had similar nation-building efforts. Instead of having the need to become economically independent from the colonial powers, Singapore has maintained the strong relations and has taken advantage of them. However, the government still uses strong post-colonial nation-building rhetoric. At the same time young people's understanding of Singaporean nation reveals that there is a feeling of Singaporeanness stemming from the daily lives and everyday experiences. Sometimes the state, and even the people themselves, do not recognize it as a sense of national belonging. In addition, the concerns about the future reflect that the confidence on the strength of the nation is not so firm.

Gupta & Ferguson (2001) write how local identities often conform to national categories, and how national thinking also combines a place and identity as if they would naturally go together. Theoretically my aim has been to show how intimate and daily life is connected to understanding of nation and national belonging, as I have moved between micro and macro level of nationalism. In wider perspective this means that nationalism is not only a state-driven force that aims to homogenize people in the local level, but it also creates differentiated identities, which get their meaning in global level and become part of people's personal daily life.

Multi-ethnic states challenge the theorizing of nationalism. This case study about Singapore shows how a poly-ethnic state endeavors to build a nation. However, the state might fail in its attempt to build a nation if it tries to follow the classic definitions of nation-states. The nationalist sentiments in Singapore are not based on common ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic background straightforwardly. Instead, there is a nascent Singaporean national culture arising from the multi-ethnic grounds. People often have to negotiate their agency in midst of official national definitions (Kalantzis 2014), which also implicates that nationalism is a multilevel issue: a feeling or desire people have to belong to a group, or an ideology that guides actions and thinking.

National categories are surprisingly significant in our daily lives even though some have predicted they would not matter anymore. Whether seen as imagined or real, whether we feel the sense of belonging to them or otherwise, nations produce national thinking, which creates feelings and experiences that are true in our daily life. I have tried to give an insight to this matter with an example from Singapore, where nation is both artificially created, but also developed in the experiences and instances of the daily life.

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